Galaxy MAGAZINE

JUNE 1959
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NO PLACE FOR CRIME
by J. T. McINTOSH

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WHATEVER COUNTS
by FREDERIK POHL

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TAKE WOODEN INDIANS
by AVRAM DAVIDSON

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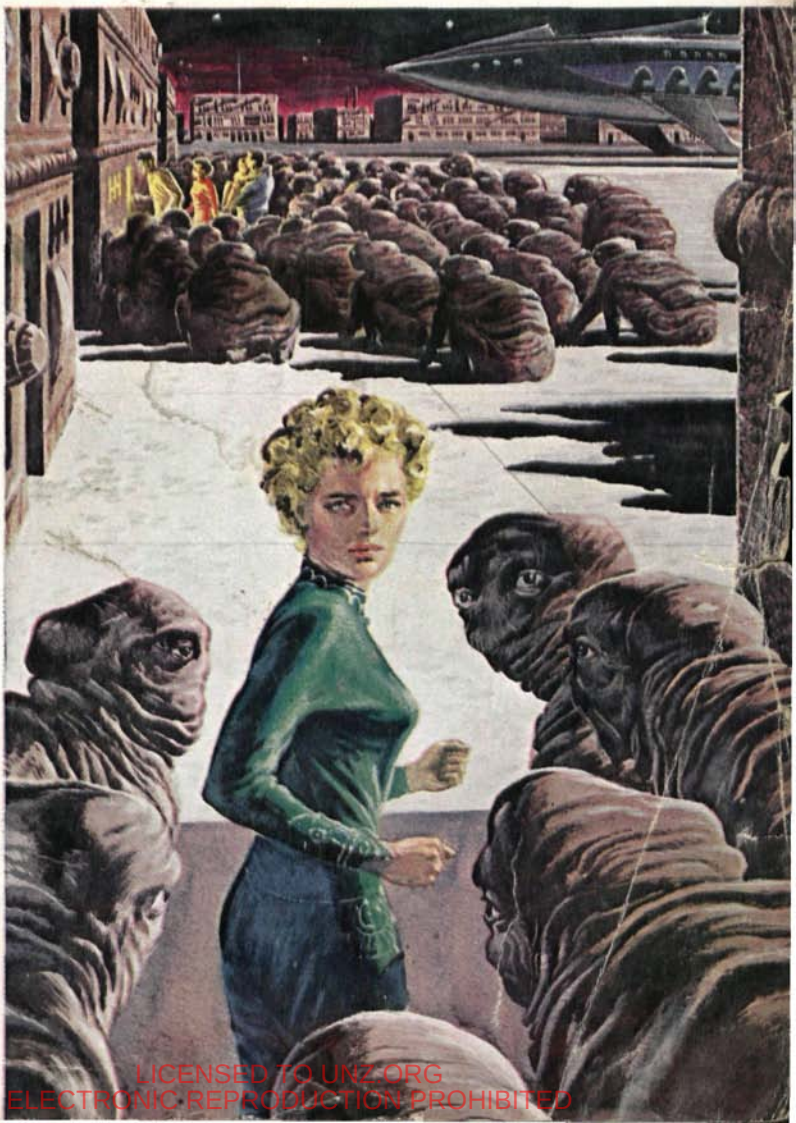
ANY QUESTIONS?
by WILLY LEY

•

EXTRACTS FROM THE GALACTICK ALMANACK
by LARRY M. HARRIS

And Other Stories



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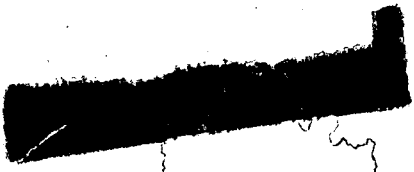

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JUNE, 1959

Galaxy

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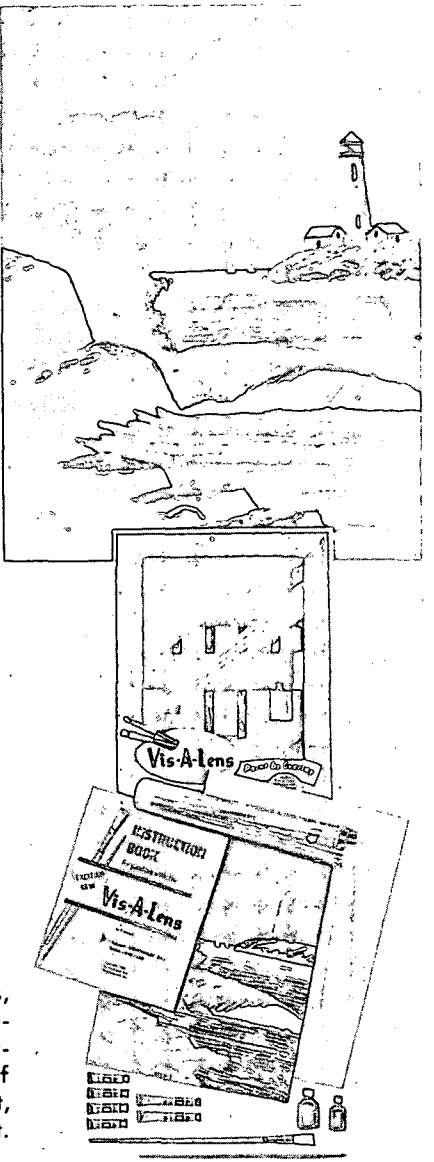

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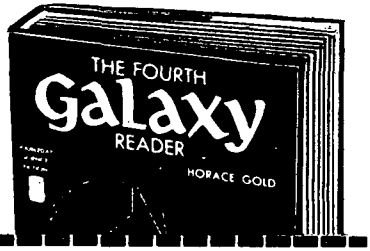

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SPECIAL DELIVERY

WE make many more adjustments to civilization than psychologists are willing to credit us with. Few of us, for example, pause long enough to be dismayed by this dismaying fact — mail: incoming *always* exceeds mail: outgoing.

That's so even in mailing houses, two of my correspondents (*more* incoming) inform me, unless the mailing houses bring in new business. If they let it slack a moment, the mailman delivers circulars, promotion letters, begging letters, coupons, free samples and other foreign matter from rival concerns.

Mailing houses and mail-order houses are not to be confused with each other, as if, having adjusted so well, you needed to be told.

Mail-order houses sell merchandise by direct mail from their own mailing departments. Nobody has to do a thing for them.

Mailing houses mail mail for firms that do not have all the frightening equipment needed to fold, stuff, address, lick envelopes, stick on stamps and push into mail-boxes the often millions of pieces of persuasion that the clients of mailing houses hire mailing houses to mail for them. Nobody does anything for mailing houses except pay them.

Mail is mentioned frequently in science fiction. Whether fast or slow, it generally resembles today's postal systems, with only an occasional extrapolation based on WW II's microfilmed V-mail. V-mail never was popular, was avoided whenever possible during the war —who wants his mail open to inspection, even when it isn't inspected? Judging by mail's negligible evolution, there may be as close a similarity between present and future postal practices as writers suggest. The single big difference is in means of transportation.

Air mail from England to Italy takes only a day or two. But surface mail can wander around for a month or more before arriving— whereas two letters that Julius Caesar wrote to Cicero from England reached Rome in 26 and 28

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days respectively. Not bad, eh?

At that time, courier mail was for the government only. But it was no more than a couple of hundred years later, in the third century, that Emperor Diocletian set up a postal system for citizens.

Pohl and Kornbluth, in their brilliant Galaxy serial *Gravy Planet,* had everything from the armed services to the post office run by free enterprise. This struck a number of people as satire. Either they forgot or never knew of mercenaries, both on an individual and army scale, and the privately operated postal systems of the past. Not only did the free-enterprise mails exist all over Europe but in Boston, in 1639, Richard Fairbanks' house was the collection point for all inbound and outgoing sea mail, on which he was allowed a penny per letter.

Things were very much otherwise in Virginia, where a postal service was established in 1657— with all planters required by law to send mail on to the next plantations, at their own expense — and a fine of a hogshead of tobacco for failure to comply.

Science fiction writers see outworld mail as unprecedentedly expensive. But in the 18th century, both in England and the Colonies, letters cost eight cents for 15 miles or less, and up to 25 cents for up to 300 miles — equal, in purchasing power, to a lot of meals.

As with all enterprises, deterioration of mail service is easier to achieve than improvement. From seven deliveries a day to the business districts and four to homes, which is really too many, the rate has been slashed to two and one, which is really too few.

On the other hand, New York City recently revolutionized its postal system, no doubt at the usual cost of revolutions — heads rolling, blood flowing, the mighty toppling from their thrones. Whatever secret plotting and split-second execution were required, the gain was worth it:

For generations, letters addressed across the street (a common urban practice in paying bills) had to travel clear to the central post office in the middle of the city and then be sent back again, which, according to a signed confession by the postmaster, sometimes took as long as four days. New interception points, or some such term, have been established midway, so that mail now has only half as far to go to get back where it started from. Progress of this sort is much harder to make than you might imagine.

Those of us who have never collected stamps, a minority that must be protected by law if it is not to become extinct, are mildly amused to find that postage stamps are not much over a century old. The first stamp was is-

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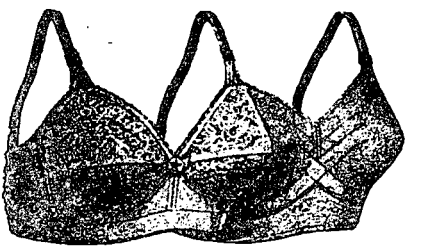
sued in England in 1840, and five years later in the U.S. — but by the postmasters of New York, Baltimore, St. Louis, Providence and New Haven. They proved popular, so Washington went into the business, though on a modest two-denomination scale; only since one or another administration of F.D.R., a notorious stamp-hoarder, has the government expanded operations to compete with small countries which get much of their revenue from philatelists.

Dedicated non-philatelists have been known to shop from one post office to another, hunting for familiar old stamps. New issues confuse and upset them as much as constantly changed shapes and colors and designs of paper money would bother philatelists. Maybe that's an unwise comment — a future numismatic President may be reading these words, and the country will be using sampler and pinup and commemorative bills in rustic and shocking and mourning hues.

Lucky thing mail-order and mailing houses weren't around in 1847 with high-pressure lobbies. That was the year all mail was ordered prepaid; before that, prepayment was optional. If the bill had been defeated, we would now be handing out cash — which was how postage was collected until stamps came into being — for our share of the several pounds of promotional material per annum dumped on each capita in every modern country.

Civilization could not exist without postal services, it should not have to be stated here. Obvious reasons aside, I am thankful for the mails because it brought Fig. 1 from D. W. Blakeslee of Oakland, Calif.



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Mr. Blakeslee writes: "Not only are *they* (extraterrestrials) among us, but in sufficient number to encourage Montgomery Ward to seek *their* patronage. The enclosed clipping (from page 51 of their catalog) is proof positive." Mr. B invites us to find four straps, and adds: "If true, wouldn't the *entire* anatomical picture be interesting?"

— H. L. GOLD

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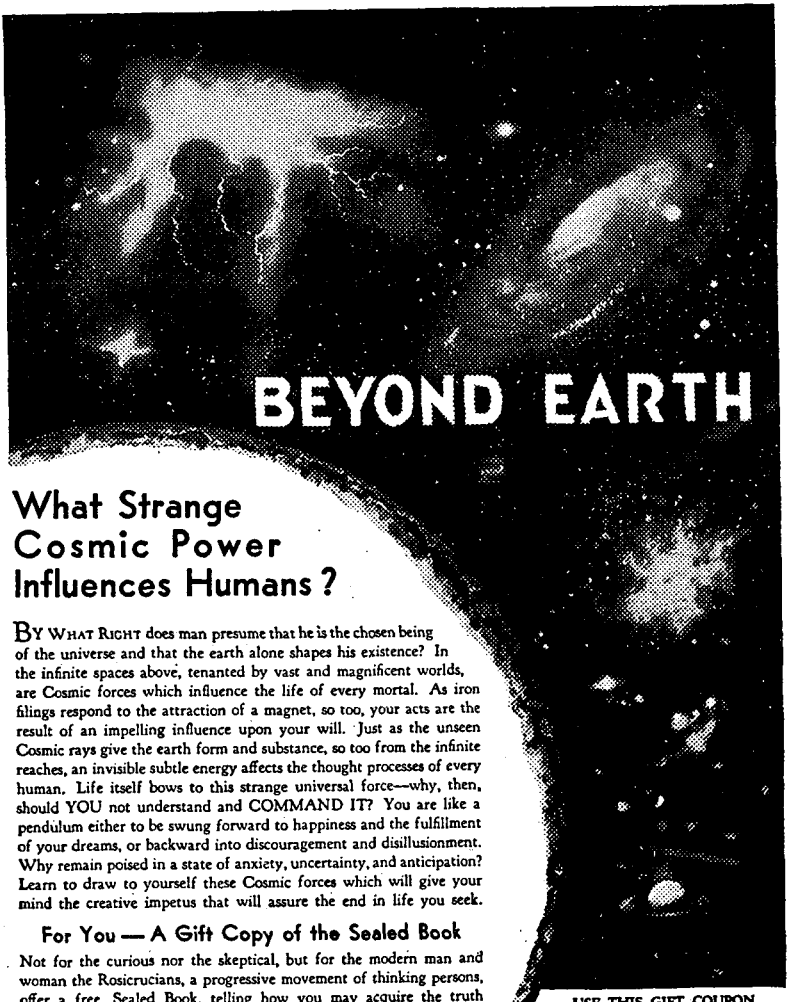

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They were not even hostile; they merely had to know all about us—whatever makes us go, whatever makes us stop, but particularly . . .

Whatever

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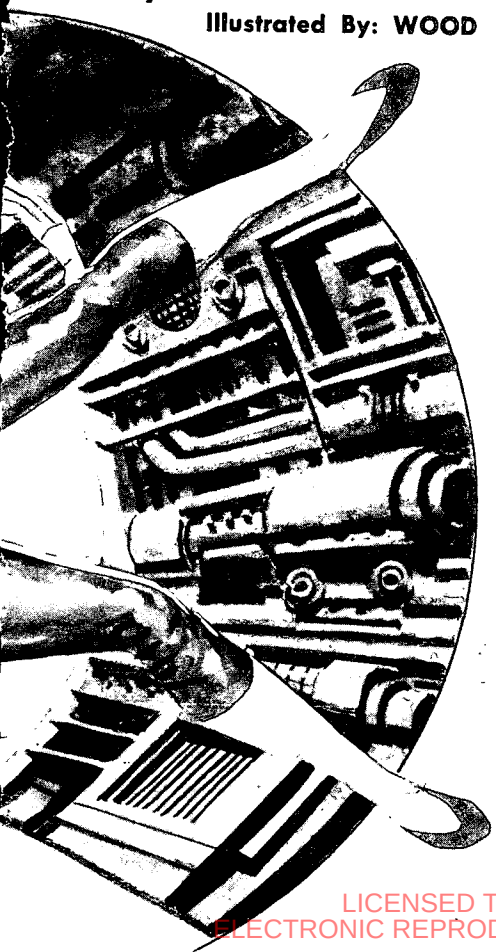
Counts

By FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated By: WOOD



I

THERE were fifty-eight of them on the trailer. Fifty-eight of them, and they had been together for a long time. But fifty-five didn't count. Only three counted, three who stood at the center of it. Hibsen was one of the ones that counted, Hibsen with the diamond epaulettes and the rope of matched rubies. And Brabant counted, Brabant and his blots of ink. And there was Rae Wensley. She may have counted the most.

But the others didn't count, however much they suffered. It was only those three.

One of the ones who didn't count was screaming. He was the littlest of them, very small and very new. Off at the outer shell of the trailer, where the scout rocket was getting ready to go, Brabant could hear him scream. Hibsen, hauling himself along a corridor with squidlike bounds, could hear him very well, and Rae could hear him even better, being closer. The littlest of them screamed because he was in agony. It was a very great pain — the greatest he had ever experienced in his life — except, perhaps, the great pain that had begun it, in the act of being born five weeks and three days before.

Rae Wensley hooked a toe under his bassinet, now standing

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sterile and empty because there was no need for bassinets where they were, and slapped at a wall switch.

"Mary!" she called urgently.

In a moment, there was a sleepy "M-m-m?" from the grille over the switch.

"Better come and help me, Mary," said Rae Wensley, and left the switch open while she went back to tending the baby. Mary was the baby's mother; the baby's screams would bring her faster than anything Rae could say over the intercom.

They had been going on for nearly an hour.

Rae, her hair net brushed askew and her golden hair beginning to creep out, found herself pleading with the baby as she slapped it, patted it, squeezed its back. "Come on, honey. Please! Get the bubble up for Rachel."

She held the child away from her searchingly; the senseless little face screwed up its eyes the tighter, and the long, hairless little head wobbled the more wildly on its gelatine neck. If they hadn't been in free-fall, she couldn't have done that, for the tiny new muscles could not have held the head. But if they hadn't been in free-fall, the little swallowing apparatus could have rid itself of the bubble of gas that brought the pain — if gravity had been there to help it. But there wasn't any gravity, not with the trailer in orbit. It was a perfectly normal baby — and a perfectly normal bubble of gas; it was only the situation that wasn't normal.

That was Rae Wensley. She was nineteen years old and had been in space for seven years.

AND then there was Computerman Hibsen. Hibsen was no colonist — no, not he! Hibsen shut his ears to the screams from the nursery, though it was getting closer and the screams were getting louder. Computerman Hibsen was all gold and gems: fine gold traceries festooned his blue silk jacket; his buttons were great pink pearls; blue diamonds winked from his fingers. He flashed and glowed in the light from the tube-lamps recessed in the corridor walls as he propelled himself by handholds; and he also sang:

"Three little spacemen
Lived on Aleph Four —
Along came the Gormen,
And they were seen no more!"

It was not a popular song with the rest of the crew and the colonists, but Hibsen himself was not popular. He didn't think that was odd. He was used to it.

He had applied for crew status on *Explorer II* out of defiance and anger, because a girl had told him he could never pass. Interstellar flight demanded more than technical skill. Hibsen had that, of

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course. But it also demanded — well, it demanded the qualities that were required of each person in a group of some fifty-odd who would be confined for more than seven years in a space about the size of a three-story apartment house.

Nobody would have guessed that Hibsen would pass, least of all Hibsen. It was a shock to him when Brabant, the psychologist, accepted him.

Hibsen reacted, as most of the fifty-odd candidates had, by drawing his salary for the eighteen-year voyage in advance, and spending it. For Hibsen, the money went into gold and gems, and every last bit of that went into all of the uniforms he took along.

He flaunted the jewel-studded uniforms for every day of those seven years, until the joke would have worn thin even to him — if it had been a joke. It wasn't. It was what he had always wanted, and now that he had it, he was satisfied: the tangible proof that he was a success.

THE baby was now purple. It was the free-fall, beyond doubt. Colic? On Earth it would have been called colic, so perhaps that was the right name.

There's an old prescription for colicky babies: Take one thick, soundproof door; close it upon the child.

That was a pretty good joke, Rae thought distractedly. There weren't enough walls in the whole trailer to shut out the sound of one screaming child. And where was Mary?

She forced herself to put the baby down. To do that, she attached dog-leash snaps to the little harness that held the baby's diaper; the leashes were fastened to the walls, and they would keep him from drifting helplessly into something. She left him hanging like Mohammed between earth and sky, and kicked herself to the corridor.

And there was Mary coming — and far behind her, just turning in from a lateral traverse, Hibsen.

"Mary, thank heaven!" Rae stopped the other woman with one hand and the two of them clung at the door of the nursery, looking inside. Rae's heart was wrung by every gasping cry. "The poor thing! He's been like this for an hour!"

"I know." Mary Marne stared in at her baby, writhing and kicking his lean, ruddy little legs. She said rebelliously: "If the baby and I could go along, this wouldn't happen any more. It isn't fair, Rae! I had everything all set up. There was plenty of room for us in the rocket until Dr. Brabant pushed in. We could all go together down to Four, and the baby would have decent gravity, and—"

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She stopped short, because the screams stopped short.

There was a strangling noise from the baby. He kicked and jerked with all his arms and legs at once. A blob of whitish-yellow frothy liquid appeared at his mouth; it broke into globules and clung to his face as he tried to inhale.

"He's spitting up!" Rachel Wensley was a few inches the closer. She leaped in first, caught at the harness straps and unsnapped the child. Mary was beside her at once, trying to help.

This was, again, a perfectly normal phenomenon. Babies with bubbles of gas in their digestive tracts need to get rid of the gas, because it's painful. Eventually they manage to expel it. Sometimes the gas comes up alone, sometimes it brings an ounce or so of milk with it. This is perfectly normal — in a normal environment.

But without gravity to clutch the milk down and away from the untutored little mouth, it becomes abnormal, and unless the breathing passages are promptly cleared, it becomes, in fact, fatal.

IN the corridor outside, Hibsen, a few yards away, heard the screams change to odd choking and bubbling noises. He caught himself by a handhold and listened, swinging like a helium balloon on a string. Then he scrambled down the lateral corridor and gaped in at the nursery door.

There was Rachel Wensley, her blonde hair floating about her head like weeds under water, braced with both legs and one arm against a changing table. Her free hand had a grip on Mary Marne's belt, and she appeared to be trying to swing the other woman around her head. Mary in turn was holding the baby with both hands, one clutching his middle, the other supporting his forehead. The baby himself, flailing around like the tip of a whip, was choking and gasping — and, in a moment, screaming again. Centrifugal force had flung the choking fluids out of his little mouth and cleared the breathing passages, which had been the idea.

Mary gasped, triumphant and relieved: "That does it, Rae! Let go!"

The acrobatic group broke up, and the two women consulted over the baby. His screams dwindled and became grunts, then something resembling small snores. His mother held him at her shoulder, patting him gently.

Rae automatically took a spare hair net out of her pocket and began to fix her hair. "Hi," she said breathlessly as she noticed Hibsen staring in.

He came cautiously in, trying to shield his pearly-gold finery

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from the small floating drops of spit-up formula. "What a mess. Everything all right?"

"It is now." Rae helped the baby's mother snap him back into the floating harness arrangement again. He was sound asleep. "Well, he got it up. But I *hate* this."

"You asked for it," chortled Computerman Hibsen, and he added: *"Colonist!"*

And colonist was what Rachel Wensley was. So were the Marnes. So were forty-one of the trailer's complement, and they were the whole reason for the trip.

For seven years, the round steel ball that was *Explorer II's* tractor had spat faint quick streams of electrons backward from its magnetic throats, and for all of those years it had looked like a child's tinker-toy, jammed together any-old-fashion.

It was an ugly spectacle of a ship. There was the tractor sphere itself, with its flaring blunderbuss exhausts. There were the long parallel strands of steel cable that linked tractor to trailer. Finally there was the trailer, shaped more or less like a can of soup, but with lumps and cobwebby masses of wire projecting from it at odd angles in odd places.

There were, for example, the two shuttle rockets. In flight, they were a part of the trailer's living space, though they were attached to it in the ungainly fashion of a child's doll carried by one heel.

There were the forty-three separate radar, radio and radiation-sensing antennae, plus the periscopes that worked with visual light.

There was the grappling unit that stuck out precariously from the cylinder's forward end.

It was impossible to believe that so clumsy and square-cornered a construction could fly. It would break to pieces, obviously. If by some fantastic mischance it didn't fall apart at the first surge of power, the protruding sections would be snatched off by the rush of air.

But this was not so.

Explorer II from the moment of its first assembly had never felt air, and it never would. It was never, from first to last, meant to accelerate fast enough to cause any strain. It was never to operate so close to any astronomical object that gravity would have an effect. It could afford to look clumsy and to be clumsy. For clumsiness carried no penalties in interstellar space. At its peak velocity, just before turnaround, *Explorer II* shot through the void at more than half the speed of light itself, so fast that mass increased minutely and the equation $MV = M^1V^1$ no longer quite held good, but the force that accelerated it on its way was like the pat from a loving hand.

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EXPLORER II had a captain, a good man named Serrell, though he didn't much matter. He had taken tractor and trailer to the place they had aimed for, a planet that had been located nineteen years before.

The name of the planet — the satellite, rather, for it circled an object that was itself a planet as huge as Jupiter — was Aleph Four. There was a stand-by party somewhere on its surface, or so they believed. At least there had been three men left by the first expedition, awaiting the relief that this present voyage was planned to supply.

So the captain's job was done. It was now only a matter of keeping the cables unsnarled and *Explorer II* in orbit, and waiting for the scout rocket to report back, and seeing that the colonists with all their goods were shuttled down to the surface that lay hidden, under heavy cloud cover and a punishingly thick ionosphere that blanketed radio waves, a hundred thousand miles below.

That was all there was to it.

Captain Serrell (though what he did now didn't matter) stayed by his conn room and cranked the periscope to try to see what he couldn't see. There should have been *some* signal from the scout rocket. Voice would be unrecognizable and even code would garble unless you were very lucky, and they hadn't been lucky. But why wasn't there some sort of signal, however faint or garbled?

Captain Serrell hooked one toe under the corner of his desk and lit a cigarette.

The blowers were going, but he automatically waved the cigarette back and forth, back and forth, in the old spaceman's gesture — a habit that clung from the days when free-fall meant that an unwaved cigarette would go out, drowned in its own Co_2—the days when every man's bunk had a little fan blowing day and night on his face.

Those were the days before first contact with the Gormen and its consequent rapid advances in spaceship design, when Captain Serrell was no captain but a young pilot-officer and fresh to space.

Now things were better arranged, with a free flow of air impelled by a hundred precisely located fans; but problems remained. There was, for example, the problem of the Gormen.

It was foolish to imagine that they could have had anything to do with the failure of the shuttle rocket to report — so Captain Serrell argued to himself. The first contact had occurred in quite another volume of space; so had the second, and so had the bloody third and fourth.

But five men had gone down in the rocket and there wasn't any

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response, not even a corrupt radio signal, not even the return of the rocket itself.

It was foolish to imagine that Gormen might be there. The first expedition would have found them if they were.

But when you believed that it was just barely possible that Gormen *might*, it made it hard to order the second rocket to go down.

II

FINALLY, last of the three, there was Dr. Brabant.

Howard Brabant was thirty-eight years old, not very tall, not very good-looking. He was crew, not colonist; he was a psychologist by profession, and what would the colony need psychology for? But he had been thinking, all the same, of changing over.

Now — maybe nobody would change over. Maybe there would be no colony. Because *Explorer* had come a little late.

Brabant, sweating more than his patient, said sharply: "I don't care how much it hurts, Marne—smile! If you can't smile, at least keep your mouth shut!"

The lieutenant stared blankly up at him. Brabant braced himself and tugged quickly on Lieutenant Marne's fractured arm.

The lieutenant grunted once, sighed and went unconscious.

Brabant wiped his forehead. All right, let him be unconscious; it was better that way. At least that way he wouldn't yell — and that might be helpful. (Or might not.) But Brabant didn't have time to follow the thought through, because he had a compound fracture to set, and not much skill at it.

He tugged again, and saw the jagged white end of bone slip out of sight. Good. So much for that. As delicately as he could, he poked and palpated the flesh of the arm where the fracture had occurred. As far as he could tell, the bone ends were lined up. There was no chance of getting an X-ray, of course, but it *felt* all right. Bones had been set without X-rays, for endless centuries before Roentgen. It would have to do.

He found an antibiotic powder, shook it on the wound and began the tedious task of splinting and bandaging. It was too bad about Marne's arm, but the lieutenant was not the worst off of any of the first rocket's crew. There was Crescenzi, who was dead; and there were de Jouvenel and himself, who were — temporarily — alive, and perhaps that was the worst of all, because they hadn't the comfort of unconsciousness.

Because they were not alone in the tiny, ancient room.

There was an audience observing every move, taking what

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looked to be notes; an audience of one, but looming large in Brabant's mind. He glanced at it under his eyebrows, then looked away.

It was a hideous thing.

It wasn't tall — not more than four feet — but it was chunky. Flesh hung from it in folds, like the hide of a rhinoceros. It had a head, and it had two eyes, and probably the horny structure at the base of its "chin" was a breathing apparatus.

It fitted the scale of the tiny chamber they were in a lot better than the humans did. But that was accident. Aliens had built this city, but not *these* aliens. The observer that silently noted every move of Brabant and de Jouvenal was in no way related to the race that had constructed their jail.

That race was dead — gone without a hope of revival, leaving a planet of vacant cities. But the race to which the rhinoceroid creature belonged was very much alive, as the human race had cause to know.

It was a Gorman.

THE other survivor of the five men who had come down in the landing party was de Jouvenel, a dark, tiny man who kept to himself. He was watching Brabant with a face like a little monkey, absolutely blank, waiting.

When Brabant looked up, de Jouvenel said: "Finished? Tell me something — why do you want Marne to smile? Matter of principle, show the aliens how brave us Earthmen are?"

Brabant said regretfully: "I don't know. It was just a thought. But the less the Gormen know about us, the better chance we have to surprise them later on."

De Jouvenel looked doubtful. "What about Marne's arm?"

"I haven't set a bone in a long time, but it looks all right."

De Jouvenel nodded and, before Brabant could stop him, took out a cigarette and lit it.

Brabant scowled, but it was too late to say anything and, anyway, it was still just an idea. But Brabant observed that as the match flared, the Gorman at the door made a quick motion of some sort. Maybe he was making a note of some kind; it stood to reason that anything as curious as inhaling smoke would be worth noting. So probably it was, though the creature carried nothing that looked like pencil, paper, or any other kind of note-taking equipment.

Brabant sighed and rubbed his head. The trouble was you couldn't understand them in terms of human referents. They were aliens, the only living, intelligent race of aliens that the human race had ever discovered — to its cost — and he had to try to school his mind to think of them that way.

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"Cigarette, Doc?"

Brabant shook his head, surprised. Why, de Jouvenel was getting positively chummy. Let the alien make another note about that: *Subject #2 does not display smoke-tropism of Subject #1.* Maybe it would confuse them, however minutely, and confusing them was probably the only chance the colonizing party had.

"How does it feel, Doc?"

Brabant looked up.

De Jouvenel grinned wolfishly. "I mean how does it feel to be the bug this time, instead of the eye in the microscope? You spent enough time watching us. I wondered if you liked it the other way around."

"That's my job, de Jouvenel!"

"Oh, sure, Doc. And you just love your work."

Brabant said harshly: "Evidently I'm not good at it. What did I do to bring out hostility at a time like this?"

"You didn't have to do a thing," de Jouvenel said seriously. "Not a thing. You think we like having somebody like you poke into our heads once a week for seven years? No offense, but a man could be a lot more charming than you, Doc, and we still wouldn't like him. Oh," he said, holding up his hand, "sure, we have to have somebody like you to keep us from blowing up. But we don't have to like it."

He came over closer, lowering his voice. "Forget it. Talk about something more important. That fellow over there, he's built pretty funny, but he can only look one way at a time, right? Well, how about if we work over close to him? You keep his eye on you and maybe I'll get a chance to kick hell out of him from behind."

"No."

De Jouvenel nodded. "That's what I thought, Doc, that's what I thought." He looked at Brabant for a moment, his little ape face perfectly serious, and then he strolled away.

BUT it was foolish — they wouldn't have a chance!

Brabant forced himself to take his mind off it. It didn't matter what de Jouvenel thought of him, at least it didn't right at this moment; what was important was that they were in trouble — not just the three of them, but the whole ship, and perhaps more than the ship.

He checked Marne's pulse and respiration, guessed they were all right, and sat back against a wall.

Here was a planet that had been perfectly empty not fifteen years before. The first expedition had checked it carefully, had found thousands of cities and villages, and not a sign of life on any of them. The first expedition had taken a long conscientious

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year at its job, with cameras and tape recorders and every known recording and observing device to help them out.

Nothing.

There were the cities, but not even an animal to prowl their streets. There were forests, with a few insects, and there were fish in the sea. But the cities had been built by neither fish nor bugs, but by warm-blooded bipeds who had known engineering and electronics, who had sailed its seas and mined its ores. Of them there was no survivor. The planet was clean.

Brabant looked around the little room. It was a dollhouse, by human standards, but the people who built it hadn't been dolls; dolls can't be murdered, as they had been. There was no doubt of that now. Even when the first expedition returned to Earth, the theory had been put forth that it was the Gormen who had done it, and the only reason to doubt it was that the Gormen didn't seem to have visited that section of space. But here they were, and there was no possibility that they were here by accident. They had *known*.

The scout rocket, navigating by computer-directed charts, had come down exactly where the permanent party was supposed to meet them—the permanent party, those three volunteers who had remained on Aleph Four to await *Explorer's* return. But the permanent party wasn't there. Then — wham-bam, the scout rocket landed, the Gormen came pouring out of the buildings.

It hadn't been a fight. It had hardly been an ambush. They were simply overpowered. One moment they were walking toward an empty building in a deserted city and the next moment scores of fast, *fast* creatures with thick skins and small pig eyes had been all over them. Resistance had been futile. But they had tried all the same, of course. It cost Lieutenant Marne a broken femur, compounded. It had cost Crescenzi and Clites, the other two men in the landing party, a great deal more than that.

Brabant roused himself and went over to de Jouvenel. At the door, the Gorman turned his head alertly to follow.

"Look," said Brabant, "I don't want you to think I'm being arbitrary."

"Sure not, Doc," de Jouvenal grunted.

Brabant tried to be persuasive. "Maybe we'll come to a physical attack sooner or later. I don't know. But right now, no. For one thing, I'm not sure the two of us together could do him any damage."

"Oh, cut it out, Doc!" The little ape face was scowling now.

"No, I mean it. What do we

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know about them? How do we know what to go for? They move quick and they take a lot of punishment. Remember when we landed? Marne shot one. He shot the leg right off it, but the thing hobbled away without making a sound. It's conceivable they don't feel pain. And if they don't, their nervous system must be — Well. What I'm trying to say is, what makes you think a Gorman *can* be knocked out?"

De Jouvenel said mildly: "I bet they can be killed."

"Friend, I don't think you could even kill *me* with your bare hands."

De Jouvenel shrugged and lit another cigarette.

Brabant persisted: "Anyway, there's a chance that the captain won't send the other rocket down, since we didn't signal an all-clear. And that means we're in trouble. But if *Explorer* opts to turn around and head for Earth, at least the rest of the ship is safe. And—"

He stopped. Both of them stood up straight.

The Gorman had moved.

THERE was no special threat in its movement, but it was a sort of threat merely to see the thing move at last. For hours it had been standing there, its stubby little hands gripping silvery objects that might have been weapons and might have been recording devices, but were certainly unfamiliar to the men. And then, without warning, *blur* and it was halfway across the room, looking out a window, and *blur* again and it was back, opening the door.

"Steady," Brabant warned. De Jouvenel glanced at him without expression.

The Gorman held the door, and in a moment another alien came in. And behind the second Gorman, something else — a figure, bent and shambling . . .

A *human* figure.

"Good merciful God," whispered Brabant, and even de Jouvenel beside him said something sharp and prayerful.

It was a human being, all right — but just barely. The man in the doorway was a million years old; he had been dying for all of those years, and it had been at least half that long since he was fed or watered, or had been allowed rest. It was impossible that he could walk, although he was walking; it was unbelievable that he could speak. A slim fringe of filthy hair surrounded a red and crusted scalp. There was a beard, ragged and stained. He was nearly naked.

The man shambled forward, within arm's-length of Brabant and de Jouvenel, and looked blearily at them out of eyes that were red-rimmed with weeping. He opened his mouth and tried to speak.

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"Ka-ka-ka-ka—" It was a stuttering babble, fighting to break through the hateful, opaque curtain that lay between himself and the sane. "Ka-ka-ka—"

De Jouvenel whispered urgently: "Doc, do you think he might be one of the guys that were left from the first trip?"

Brabant shook his head, not to say no but to say: I can't believe it.

True, it had been fifteen years since the first ship left. True, captivity in Gorman hands would probably be no rest cure. But this decrepit, destroyed hulk?

"Ka-ka-ka —" choked the stranger, weeping in rage and fear. And then he reeled closer, the wrecked eyes on them with a watery stare.

He wiped his wet beard and took a deep, sobbing breath, and forced himself to speak. "Captain Fa-Farragut?" he croaked.

Carefully, Brabant put out a hand to support the scarecrow. He said, forming huge round words with his lips as one who speaks to a retarded child: "Captain Farragut is not here. He is back on Earth. This is the second expedition, not the first."

The old man stared and began to sway.

"Too late!" he screamed appallingly, and fell like an ancient brittle doll to the floor in front of Brabant.

III

ROCKET Number Two ripped into the air of Aleph Four with eleven persons aboard, three of them children.

Computerman Hibsen, strapped in the padded bucket before the controls, shouted and sang along with the enormous racket of the splitting air. He was enjoying himself. He had very little else to do. Piloting a rocket under power is a job for machines, not for men. The speeds were too fast; the decisions had to come too quickly. A machine could react fast enough to make the minute adjustments that meant the difference between landing and catastrophe, but not the burdened, cogitative human mind.

"Sailor, beware!"
sang Hibsen;
"Sailor, take care!
Many brave hearts
Lie asleep in the deep."

He didn't have the voice for it, either — he was a flat and nasal baritone at best — but the rockets covered all. And, as mentioned, there wasn't much else to do. There was very little to see, even, though as the rocket sliced out through the bottom of the cloud cover at the end of its thousand-mile curve, he, and he alone, caught kaleidoscope glimpses of brown and green and dirty blue. But that wasn't enough to pilot by.

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In the rocket's plastic nose the only eyes that mattered, the spinning radar plates, felt the landscape below for bumps and ridges, and compared them with its built-in pattern of course and destination, constructed from the first expedition's maps. Digital relays took the signal from the radar eyes, counted briskly on their winking electronic fingers, and selected the exact increments of course and speed that would poise them, butt down, over the selected landing area.

The jets flared, flared again; the jolt set all the spring cocoons bouncing, bouncing.

"Everybody up!" brayed Hibsen, clawing at the buckles that held him in. The eight adults began to do the same.

Rae Wensley, strapped in an acceleration cocoon next to the Marne baby, reached for the little thing crying feebly.

"*That's* a good fellow," she crooned, unbuckling straps. "*Good* little fellow. Oh, nothing to *cry* about."

She never stopped talking to the child, though probably he couldn't hear — and wouldn't care if he could — and she never looked up, until she had found the sterile squeeze bottle, prepared at cast-off time and still warm enough. She uncapped it, popped up the nipple with one quick squeeze, and cradled the baby.

It stopped crying in order to feed.

Then she leaned forward to look out of the opening port, to see just where they were.

Hibsen was outside already, skipping and swearing on the smoking ground.

"Retty!" he yelled, and the red-haired crewman dropped gingerly out of the port, yowled and jumped off the area the jets had charred. "Retty, you climb a hill or a tree and look around. Colaner, stay in the ship. Try to contact Captain Serrell and report safe landing. Leeks! You and Cannon start unloading. And you girls get the kids out of the way, will you?"

Oh, it was a good time for Computerman Hibsen, with orders to give and ten persons to obey them.

Carefully, Rae Wensley handed the baby down to Mary Marne, dancing impatiently on the hot sand; and then she followed, and, for the first time in her nineteen years, she stood on soil that had never circled Sol.

It was hot.

She hurried off it.

They were on a beach, a gray and grimy one, with water raising a small pattern of surf twenty yards away. It was hot, not just the burned sand but the air. Aleph Four's primary radiated largely at the red end; there was heat enough, and perhaps more than enough, but the light was hardly

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more than a twilight sky. They should be very near to one of the deserted cities, Rae knew, but there wasn't any sign of it, only a wood of greasy, pendulous trees that came down to the sand itself.

IT was Rae who counted, and Hibsen, joyously bellowing orders, and Brabant crouched over the waking, feverish husband of Mary Marne hardly a mile away, but some of the others counted a little too. Mary Marne herself was one.

Time was when Mary Marne had been Mary Davison, twenty-nine years old, a typist for the United Nations Exploration Commission and engaged to a hero of interstellar flight. The engagement was very real to her, although it had been entered into when she was only sixteen. A girl who chose to get engaged to a member of an interstellar exploration party had surely a decade of waiting to look forward to, perhaps several. It was an unrewarding prospect, but that is not an argument persuasive to sixteen-year-old minds.

So young Mary kissed her Florian good-by at the spaceport and returned to school. Time passed. School ended. Mary reached the age of twenty-two. She attended the bridal showers of her classmates, caught the bouquet at her sister's reception, practiced baby-sitting on her first two nephews. Florian's ship was then halfway through its deceleration period, on the outward leg of its trip.

Mary went to work for the Commission. It helped her to remember Florian. She became a typist and remained one; it was not her intention to make a career, only to mark time for her fiance's return. Other girls in the secretarial pool dated and married, one by one, but not Mary. What had started as a teen-ager's fierce attempt to mark out a claim on a grown-up way of life became a matter of obstinate pride, then of habit.

Other girls had been engaged to spacemen and, in the long years, forgot their engagements. Not Mary. Some went through an entire marriage — engagement, wedding, childbirth, divorce. Some went through more than one. But not Mary. She had promised. It did not become easier.

It became harder, for as the thirteen years dragged by, toward the end a new disturbance began to be felt; besides the mating thrust of her glands and the pressure of her fellows, there came fear. Who was this Florian whose photograph on her desk was a yellowing lie? Who was this man of thirty-one who must by now have replaced the eighteen-year-old she had pledged to marry?

The thirteen years ended.

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Radar sweeps from the satellites of the methane giants hunted ceaselessly for the returning ship, and they found it, a decelerating blip that took shape as the familiar tractor-trailer. Chemical rockets leaped out from them and touched it. Radio carried the message back to Earth.

Mary Marne, eight years later, cradling her baby on a stranger planet than ever Florian had seen, remembered how they had brought her the news. Before they said a word, she knew, though no one had heard of the Gormen then. That was the first brush, orbiting around a star a dozen light-years from where she stood; the exploring rocket had been destroyed, and Florian was on that rocket. The eighteen-year-old had never reached thirty-one at all.

Young Mary was hardly heartbroken — thirteen years is a long time — but she wept. She cried for nearly a month, while every TV station carried the tapes that the shattered survivors had managed to bring back, tapes of the Gorman rockets — great, squat, hideous things — tapes of Gorman weapons, and, most chilling of all, the tapes that showed the Gormen themselves.

Gormen — where had the name originated? It was as familiar throughout Earth as though that race had always been known, needing only the fact of meeting to bring the word leaping to the tongue. There was a David Gorman on that poor, dead ship — had he named them, or had they been named for him, perhaps their first victim? Had the Gormen communicated with a crew and given their own name for themselves? There were other guesses, but none of them mattered now, even the possibly right ones. Man and Gorman had met, and met again, and each encounter was a bloody clash, and then *Explorer II* was ready to receive its crew, and she passed the test.

It wasn't, for Mary, an attempt to strike back at those who had killed her lover, for *Explorer II* was going in the opposite direction. It wasn't a desire for adventure. It was flight. Mary fled, light-years away.

It was ironical, what there was for her at the end of the fleeing.

RAE Wensley finished helping to offload supplies. Colaner was still trying to reach the mother ship by radio, but without success. Retty had returned from his hill to report that he had spotted the city, but nothing else, and had gone back again. Hibsen, his gem-studded tunic dark with sweat, was blowing heavily, leaning against a tree.

Rae came to help Mary with the baby. Already Gia Crescenzi, whose two children were the rest

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of the complement of the rocket, had found something to feed them and had brought them to join Mary and the baby. The three women watched the child, concerned.

The baby was not aware that he was on a strange planet, he only knew that something was squeezing and pressing him, in a way that had never happened before, and he didn't like it. He cried fretfully and forever, now that he had finished his bottle. He slept briefly, and waked to try to lift his tiny arms, to turn his wobbly head.

Rae said sympathetically: "He isn't used to gravity, poor kid."

"Poor kid," echoed Gia Crescenzi, but she was looking at her own two.

The girl was five, the boy a year younger; in spite of the sternly enforced hours each day with the exercising machines, they were making heavy going of trying to walk and run and jump on a planet. It didn't matter to them that the gravity that had pulled down Alexander and Napoleon alike had never touched them, that the sun that Joshua had stopped had become a dwindled and unfindable star among millions beyond the cloud cover. It mattered to them, as to the baby, that they had unwelcome *weight*. It was troublesome for a mother, but Gia Crescenzi was troubled enough already; her husband had gone with the first rocket, like Mary Marne's, the rocket that had not been heard from.

Rae thought rebelliously: At least they have a right to worry about their men. Brabant won't even give me that right. He thinks I'm just a child.

She corralled the two older children and started teaching them the fine points of walking. Then—

"What was that?" cried Gia, her voice thin with fear.

It had been a sound from the hanging trees.

Hibsen jumped up. Colaner's face appeared at the rocket's port. Rae, a child at each arm, swept them close to her protectively; it had been a frightening sound.

And frightening in fact.

Mary Marne screamed.

SOMETHING was coming out of the greasy forest — a good many somethings, elephantine and gray. They came down on the party with incredible speed, a score of them in the first bunch and many more thrusting through the trees behind.

"Gormen!" bellowed Hibsen, scrabbling for a stick, a knife, anything that would be a weapon.

But there was no weapon. The tractor-trailer had had few, and all of them had gone with the first rocket.

Hibsen lunged at the Gormen barehanded, checked himself,

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whirled. "Colaner!" he shouted. "Blast off!"

It was a triumph of reason over instinct. Instinct said *Fight!* but there was no hope in a fight. The only hope was that miraculously the rocket might get safely off.

But it wasn't a day for miracles. The Gormen were all around now, not brutal, not cruel, merely invincible; there was a knot of them around every human, even the children. Colaner had heard, and he did his best. Red fire roared from the rocket.

But no man could balance that ship, only the computer, and that had not been programmed for the return trip. Whatever Colaner did, it was not enough. The rocket danced and wobbled, painfully climbing. It hung crookedly overhead, singeing them all; it was like a shower of acid. The smell of crisping hair — and flesh — filled their nostrils.

And the Gormen had them all.

All but two. Not Colaner, who somehow got the rocket slashing waveringly out to sea. And not Leeks, who had been closest to the rocket and would never need to fear capture again. His cindered body flopped to the gray sand, scratched against it, lay still.

Half a mile out to sea, the rocket plunged into the water with a plume of steam and, moments later, a wild roar, as the children began to shriek.

IV

RAE Wensley limped along a resilient street between empty buildings, in darkness. She ached and she was frightened, but it was queerly exciting, all the same, to be walking through a city that had been built by a dead race. Beside her, Hibsen stalked angrily along, carrying one of Gia Crescenzi's children. The boy was whimpering softly. The sound caught at Rae's heart, for the child was fretfully repeating, "Mommy! Mommy!"

And his mother had made the mistake of attacking one of the Gormen.

Mary Marne panted from behind: "Look! Isn't that the other rocket?" It was something, certainly enough, something that was tall enough to loom over the rather low buildings and metallic enough to catch a few glints of light from somewhere.

"That's it," snapped Hibsen, straining to see.

They rounded a corner and there it was — the rocket, all right, squatting silently on its skids in a broad plaza. From one of the buildings, light streamed out, but the Gormen hurried them past it, not even pausing, though one of the Gormen that had captured them shouted something in their high-pitched quacking and was answered from inside. Another build-

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ing, this one smaller and isolated from those around it, showed fainter, bluer light as they approached. They were hustled inside.

Rae stumbled past a motionless Gorman at the door, blinked and cried: "It's them! Mary, your husband's here!" It was a little room, with a flaring blue light dangling from the ceiling, and Marne lay propped on one elbow, blinking up at them, in a corner of it. De Jouvenel squatted beside him, his dark face comically surprised. No one else.

Rae said to Lieutenant Marne urgently: "Where's Dr. Brabant?" But Marne had no patience for that sort of question, not just then. He pushed himself up, and Rae saw that one arm was in a sling.

"Mary!" he shouted and rushed toward them, half-crouched; he was not a tall man, but his head brushed the ceiling of that room. His wife ran to him. The baby was in one arm, but the other arm was free and she wrapped it around him in a great soundless passion of relief. Rae, watching, felt something inside her move oddly.

She caught de Jouvenel's arm. "Where's Brabant?" He looked at her and his face went all stiff and opaque. "Please!" she begged.

"He's alive," de Jouvenel said unwillingly. "Or he was an hour ago."

"Then where—"

The man's voice was hostile. "I don't know," he snapped, and brushed past her to join the others.

SHE wandered through the house that the Gormen had turned into a prison for them. She had seen photographs of the desecrated buildings on Aleph Four; all of the colonists had. But the photographs didn't show scale, didn't show the finicky smallness of the rooms, didn't show the delicate daintiness of the furnishings.

There was nothing left of the builders of the houses but a few pictures, pictures of frail bipedal creatures with lemur's eyes. But they had not been gone long. Even in this damp climate, wood and paperlike objects had not had time to decay. The house they were in was three stories high, each story less than six feet from floor to ceiling, except for a few larger rooms at the back of the ground floor. All the rooms were free to the captured humans, but nothing outside. The Gorman at the door by which they had entered was only one guard; there were others, outside and on the tough but yielding roof.

But, in all truth, that was not the major preoccupation of Rae Wensley's mind. She was beginning to form a most peculiar notion of the previous inhabitants of Aleph Four. Plumbing was not a

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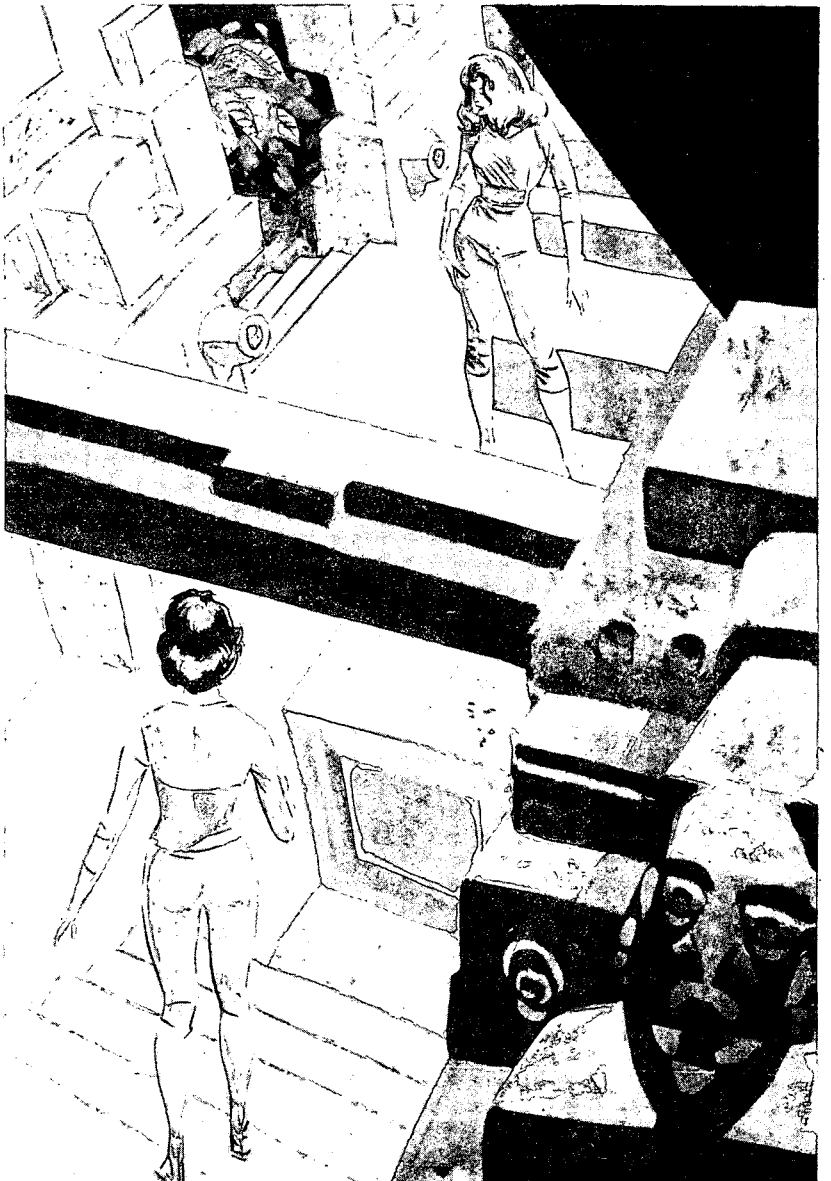

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feature of their architecture. The marks of gracious living were in the rooms, but grace for them consisted in things that looked beautiful and served beautiful functions.

There was statuary — it *might* have been statuary, anyway. There were musical instruments — one a sort of tuned drum, with a molded head that produced a diatonic scale around the rim. There were pictures, some representational, some perhaps not — it was hard to tell. But there was very little else that, to Rae Wensley, marked the difference between civilization and animal existence. It was, she thought, torn between discomfort and giggling, not one of the more easily accepted hardships of space flight that nowhere in sight was there a door marked "Powder Room."

It wasn't until Mary Marne found her wandering, listened, laughed, and showed her the astonishingly convenient vegetative arrangements in the cellar that Rae's spirits improved enough to let her worry about Brabant.

WHEN she got back to the main room, where the silent Gorman guard still stood, there was a stranger.

"Rae!" cried Hibsen. "Where've you been? Never mind! This is Sam Jaroff, Rae — from the first expedition!"

They pushed her forward. Obviously, this man needed help, and she was the nearest thing left to a doctor, having had the practice of caring for babies in the trailer. Rae poked around in the emergency kit while the old man did his choking best to answer a thousand questions.

He was frightening, she thought, frightening! He had eaten poorly for a long time. Massive diet deficiencies were obvious in his sparse hair, his dry and crusted skin, even the weeping old eyes. The only cure for that was rest and food, Rae thought worriedly, reading labels, but probably some vitamin concentrates would help.

While she was working, the Marne baby woke long enough to scream.

Mary hurried to feed it; the Gorman at the door looked silently and, *blur*, he was standing over them to peer down at the little red face. It was like a carved thing, watching; then, without a sign, it went *blur* to the door again and stood waiting.

–Sam Jaroff twisted restlessly under Rae's hands, saw the Gorman and screamed thinly. It paid no attention. He gasped: "Sorry, miss!"

Hibsen looked at the girl and shook his head. "He's had it rough," he said without humor.

But the old man heard. "Rough?" He sat up. "Every day

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I wished I was dead. Skinner was the lucky one."

"Ssh," soothed Rae, pressing him down, but the man shook her off; he wanted to talk.

Hibsen and de Jouvenel helped him to lean against a wall. He said: "There were the three of us, Chapman, Skinner and me. We were here a year and a half. Then we saw the ship."

He breathed hard for a moment, the rheumy old eyes blinking. "Skinner saw it," he said. "He was the radioman and he picked something up that he couldn't read. Well, he said so — but we didn't believe him, you know, not at first. We never heard of Gormen. I never heard the name until Dr. Brabant said it. We didn't know there was anything alive in space except people, and—

"Well, we learned." He coughed hoarsely, looked up into Rae's eyes and quickly covered his mouth. "Sorry," he mumbled. "Anyway, after Skinner claimed he got these signals, we kept a watch and maybe we saw the ship. I guess we did. There was something, and we thought it might be a meteorite, but it must have been a Gorman rocket. But we didn't know for sure, and then nothing happened. For a long time. It's all in the log, in case you want to read it. I guess it's still around someplace. Not in this building, of course. But the Gormen have that log now, and —

"Well, anyway. Nothing happened, like I say, for a long time. Two years. We put crops in, down by the creek, but they didn't do well. Root vegetables died. Carrots, potatoes, turnips — the carrots would grow down about an inch and a half, and then nothing. By the time they were big enough to eat, they were all knotted up, not worth eating. It was like the topsoil was too thin, you know? Like somebody living in a development house where the builder just put in enough to make the first spring's lawn and— But it wasn't that, though. There's plenty of topsoil, but below the surface, nothing lived. I thought about it for years," he said earnestly, "and, you know, I'm damned if I understand it. At first I thought it was too much moisture, but—

"Sorry," he said, coughing and wiping his face. "I kind of forgot how to talk. Anyway, the crops didn't work out so well. Well, then. The aliens came back. That thing we saw, it must've been a ship, and they must've spotted us. Where were they those two years? I don't know. They've got a kind of a camp on Bes. That's where I was for a couple years. Maybe they were there all the time, even when Captain Farragut was here. But we didn't see them, until—"

Jaroff stopped and wept silently.

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HIBSEN said harshly: "Look, you don't have to tell us all this right now! There's plenty of time!"

"I want to," said Jaroff, rubbing his watery eyes. "And are you sure about plenty of time? I'm not. There might not be any time at all." He twisted uncomfortably against the wall, his eyes on the silent Gorman at the door.

He said: "They came at night. We were all asleep. No guards, nothing like that. Well, who would think we needed them? But the noise should have woke us up. It didn't, though. What woke me was —was Chapman screaming.

"He wasn't in the house with Skinner and me," Jaroff explained carefully. "We'd had a kind of— not a fight, but we weren't getting along so well. He'd lost one of Skinner's books, see, and so Skinner wouldn't lend him the ukele and Chapman —

"It doesn't matter. But Chapman moved out and set up his own place in one of the buildings across the street. The red one. We called it the House of Morgan. There was a little inlaid thing on the ceiling and it was gold, and Skinner called it that, and—

"The Gormen went there first. We woke up, hearing him screaming, and we came running—

"Chapman was still alive," Jaroff said slowly. "Oh, he lived about two years after that. He even went to Bes with me. I didn't see him much, but after he died I saw him. They used him for dissection. I guess they wanted to—to—"

Jaroff stopped and looked at the floor for a moment. Then, "They hurt me a lot," he said, very softly, "testing my reflexes and like that. But they didn't kill me, although I asked them. I begged them.

"Skinner they killed, right there in the House of Morgan. He had a gun, and he shot six of them first.

"So then I was on Bes for — Dr. Brabant figured it out for me. About ten years, after Chapman died. Eating mush, and all the time they were watching me. Sometimes they wouldn't bother me for a couple of weeks, and sometimes the mush tasted funny and I got sick. They were trying things, you see. They tried a lot of things. Sometimes they hurt me." He rubbed the fine lacework of white scar tissue on his arm.

"And then they brought me back here. It was about a month ago, and I didn't know why, but maybe I know why now. I guess they saw *Explorer II* on their radar, if they have radar. Or perhaps you sent a message and they got it. I don't know.

"But I'm pretty sure they knew you were coming, and that's why they brought me right back here. I think they were going to use me

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for bait, maybe. Put me out in the open, with a lot of them all around, hiding. But they didn't have to. They—"

He began to sob.

Hibsen stood up. That's enough," he growled. "Let him alone." He turned to the Gorman guard.

But de Jouvenel's hand was on his arm and, after a moment, Hibsen looked down at the little dark man and nodded.

"All right," Hibsen said. "I'm not going to do anything."

RAE was half asleep on the floor, the baby snoring in quick light breaths beside her, when she felt Hibsen's hand on her shoulder.

"Council of war," he said. "Come on, Rae, wake up. The Gorman's gone."

She looked at the door; it was true. The room was almost completely dark, but enough light flickered in from the Gorman buildings across the square to show shadowy figures, the walls, the scant furnishings. The Gorman wasn't there.

"Wake up," said Hibsen more loudly, stirring Mary Marne and her husband with his toe as they lay side by side nearby. "De Jouvenel, you awake? Retty?"

They all came awake at once.

Hibsen said: "Retty, stay by the door. We don't know how long that thing's going to be away. Keep an eye open." He turned to Marne. "Lieutenant, you rank me. Do you want to take charge?"

Marne shook his head. "I'm not much use with this arm. Anyway, it doesn't matter right now, does it?"

"It might," said Hibsen. "There's our ship out there and we're not guarded. Well? What about it?"

Rae caught her breath. "But it can't carry all of us!"

"It can carry some of us," Hibsen corrected. Sam Jaroff, propped on his elbow at the fringe of the group, moaned softly. "That's right," Hibsen brutally clarified. "Some of us would have to stay behind."

Rae Wensley said sharply: "That's not fair! What about the children?" Hibsen shook his head. "And Sam Jaroff? And what about Dr. Brabant? He isn't even here—how can we go off and leave him?"

"He left us."

"Now that's a—"

"Shut up, Rae!" Hibsen's voice snapped like a mule-skinner's whip. "Don't talk about what's fair. This is a matter of survival." He moved quickly to the window, nodded and returned. "The rocket's right there. There's no Gorman in sight, though I can hear them across the square. I can get into that rocket without being seen, I

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promise. Five minutes and I'll have a course set on the computers that will take us close enough to *Explorer's* orbit. But it won't be accurate, so I'll need reserve power for maneuvering. That means—" he hesitated—"not more than three people."

"Three—"

"Three people alive," he cut in grimly, "is better than all of us right here dead! And Captain Serrell hanging up there, fat and happy — until the Gormen get around to locating him and knocking the whole ship off!"

"No," said Rae Wensley positively. "Not without Brabant."

"The devil with Brabant! He went off with the Gormen. If he likes them so well, he can stay!"

SHE shook her head. Her mind was closed; she wasn't prepared to listen. She said: "Don't you see? When he comes back, he'll have more information for us. What right have you to think he had anything to say about whether he went with them or not? And certainly he'll use every chance he gets to find out their weak spots. They—"

"They haven't got any," said Sam Jaroff's hoarse, thin voice, and he caught her arm. "Listen to him, girl! I'm scared, but it doesn't matter how scared I am — he's right. Let him get away! We're all dead here anyway."

"Right," said Hibsen. "Now let's get down to it. Rae, you're overruled. De Jouvenel, stand by while I try to make it to the scout rocket. Once I'm inside, if any Gormen wander along, you'll have to—"

"Hibsen!" hissed Retty piercingly from the door. "Come here and take a look!"

All of them came crowding around the windows and the open door, looking out onto the little square.

Gormen were out there.

There were at least a dozen of them, and they were moving around the first scout rocket, crouched cold and silent on its skids.

"We'll have to wait," said Hibsen, his eyes fixed on the aliens. "Maybe they'll go away."

"They're not going to go away," whispered Rae. "Look, Hibsen! What are they doing?"

The squat quick things were in and out of the rocket's port. Like ponderous jack rabbits, they hopped up into the belly of the little ship and those inside began handing things out to those on the ground. And the things they were handing out—

Glittering metal instrumentation. Black slabs of panel mounting. Copper entrails of wire.

"They're taking out the computers!" cried Lieutenant Marne, holding his splinted arm. "Hibsen,

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do you know what that means? We wouldn't be able to fly the rocket now, even if we could get to it!"

"That's right," snarled Hibsen. "Pretty clever, eh? And what do you suppose gave them that idea?"

He turned a face of fury on Rae Wensley. She couldn't help it; she recoiled from the rage he showed.

"That's pretty smart," he said. "They know a lot about us, don't they? And there's only one place they could have learned it—from your pet headshrinker, Brabant!"

V

ALL through the night, sputtering electric flares illuminated the square outside the building where the humans were captive.

Under the flickering light, the gray Gormen worked to pile fragments of control mechanism onto a high-wheeled cart. It was a maddening sight for Hibsen; he knelt by the window as long as he could, feeling every hammer blow on his own flesh. But not even rage can sustain wakefulness forever, and in time he slept.

Rae Wensley woke him in the morning. She had got up to the baby's crying, fed him, changed him and put him in a corner, a tilted table protecting him from being stepped on. Hibsen heard and came instantly awake.

He sat up, looked around once and scowled. Outside, the square was empty of life. Cold damp air rolled in the open door. Gray light was coming up.

"I see they're through," Hibsen whispered bitterly, nodding toward the square.

But Rae was more preoccupied with other problems. She had discovered there were only three more sterile bottles of formula for the baby, plus what little was in his mother's breasts. Mary Marne's intentions were good, but she had not been able to nurse the child. It was absolutely essential to find a substitute.

She said as much to Hibsen. He shrugged. "Three bottles is a whole day, isn't it? We'll see."

"And we're out of diapers."

He got up and walked away. "Ask your friend Brabant," he said over his shoulder. "He's on good terms with the local authorities."

He left the girl angry, but that was the way he wanted her to be, angry. Anger is too powerful a force to be confined; it bursts out and drenches whatever object is convenient. If he left her angry enough, perhaps some of it would erupt at the headshrinker.

And that was fair and just, Hibsen considered, because he was at least half sincere in saying that he believed Brabant had sold out to the Gormen. What's more, it served his ends. There was still the chance of escape — somehow.

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And it was going to be a long, lonely voyage back to Earth, and it would be much less lonely if Rae Wensley came along.

Without the headshrinker.

THE Gorman was back inside the door again, watching, watching. De Jouvenel, dunking a cake of compressed cereal into cold black coffee, said dourly: "I wanted to jump that thing. Brabant wouldn't let me. What do you think, Hibsen?"

Hibsen grinned tightly. "I think—" He glanced at Rae Wensley and winked. "I think you better hurry up with that cup, Joe. Others are waiting."

Rae was trembling. *"Stop it!* I know you don't like Dr. Brabant, but this is no way to talk! You've got no right to assume he's doing anything wrong. You weren't even here when the Gormen took him away!"

"He didn't struggle very hard," de Jouvenel observed.

Hibsen shook his head. "No, Joe, that's no way to talk. We've got no right to assume anything wrong." And he winked again.

He got up and drifted over to the window, well pleased. Out there was scout rocket one, squatting patiently. Maybe, thought Hibsen, maybe yet—

But it was out of the question. They couldn't possibly fly that one. Not without the built-in computing autopilots. But there was the chance — maybe, possibly — that they could find and re-install the computing mechanisms. Or something. Anyway—

"Hey," said Hibsen, "come here a minute, Marne. What's that?"

He pointed across the square. There was a building, more or less like the others, but light glinted from something inside it.

"Looks like gold," de Jouvenel ventured. "Jaroff, is that the place you call the House of Morgan?"

The old man limped over. "That?" he said, squinting. "No. The one with the pink roof, that's the House of Morgan. That's where they got Skinner, you know. When they first landed."

"Well, then, what the devil is it?"

"That's their ship," Jaroff said wearily, and dragged himself back.

Hibsen caught his breath. *"Their* ship."

Then he stood straight, his head nearly brushing the ceiling. "All right!" he said in a harsh tone. "That's the answer! They've messed up our rocket — we'll use theirs!" He looked around at the circle of doubting faces. "What's the matter now? Don't you believe I can fly it?"

"No," said a voice from the door, "I don't believe you can."

They all turned. There was Brabant, two Gormen behind him, standing in the door.

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Silence for a second.

Then, "Come in, Doc," said Hibsen, "come right in. We've been wanting to talk to you. Bring your friends, if you like. They're just as welcome as you are."

BRABANT came in, glancing at Rae, but his face was impassive.

Hibsen breathed on the star sapphire in his left lapel and burnished it on his other sleeve. It was a habit of his; it made him feel a little more comfortable in situations of strain. He said politely: "Did you have a nice time, Doc?"

"Not very."

"That's too bad," said Hibsen, shaking his head in regret. "I guess they just don't know how to treat a guest. Right, Jaroff?" The old man looked dimly away. "Well, when you came in, you had some comments to make on my idea, didn't you, Doc? You said I couldn't fly the Gorman ship."

"And you can't."

"Mind telling me why?"

"Because," Brabant said, "you're not a Gorman. You ought to know that much, Hibsen, being a computerman! Why do you think they pulled the course-computers out of the scout rocket?"

"As a matter of fact," Hibsen said, "we were wondering about that, Dr. Brabant."

"Because they don't need them, that's why! We do, but they don't — that's the way Gormen are built."

Hibsen said angrily, knowing it was untrue, unable to keep from saying it: "I can do anything they can do! Whose side are you on?"

Brabant blazed: "You fool! Do you think you can fly a rocket without computers? You can't! No man can as much as balance a rocket on its tail — it takes a machine to do that. And the machines aren't there. The Gormen never had them in their own ship, so naturally they've taken them out of ours! Curiosity? I don't know. It's as good an explanation as any."

He got up and pointed out the window. The three impassive aliens watched him with their eyes, but didn't move.

"Look out there! See those buildings down the square? They're full of Gormen! I guarantee you can't take a single step out this building without one of them being right on your back. They're *fast*. But even if you could, then what? It doesn't matter which ship you go for, our scout or theirs; it needs a machine to fly it. You've all been in rockets at takeoff. You know what happens. A couple of seconds of full blast, and they haven't even moved yet.

"Then they begin to lift — oh, maybe a couple of inches in the next second. In the fifth second,

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they can gain perhaps a foot or two. But they have to get upward of fifty or sixty miles an hour to become aerodynamically stable — and that takes *fifteen seconds*. And in those fifteen seconds, friend, you can be dead a dozen times. Anything — *anything* — can tip the ship, just a fraction of a second of arc, but when it begins to tip, it has to be corrected — not when you get around to it, but *right now*. Are you fast enough for that, Hibsen? You're not. I'm not. No human being is."

He turned from the window. "As far as we're concerned, those ships might as well not be there."

HIBSEN stood looking angrily after Brabant as the psychologist walked away, over to the wall where their scant rations lay heaped, and selected a biscuit.

Absently Hibsen rubbed his sapphire, unable to take his eyes off Brabant. No one spoke, and that annoyed Hibsen; what right did the headshrinker have to come in and demolish their plans? All right, he thought irritably, maybe it wasn't going to be easy. But surely there was a way. There *had* to be a way. Otherwise that star sapphire would wind up in some rhinoceros-skinned alien's pocket, a toy for the kiddies, maybe, instead of a couple of decades of happy living for Robert Hibsen, Esq.

De Jouvenel said across the room: "What's the matter, Doc? Didn't your friends feed you?"

Brabant, chewing, said stolidly: "No." But his expression was strained. Hibsen noticed and was maliciously amused. Why, Doc's worried too, he thought.

Brabant looked at the half biscuit, uneaten, in his hand, stopped chewing and put it down. "Well, we'll have to do better than this. I've arranged for supplies to be brought out of the scout rocket."

"What?" Rae Wensley demanded. "How—"

Brabant's expression changed slightly, queerly, almost to a look of embarrassment. "I've made some arrangements with them," he said, his voice not very loud. "I—I'll need your cooperation — all of you — to help carry them out."

De Jouvenel laughed without humor.

Rae asked sharply: "What arrangements?"

"The only kind that are open to me," Brabant said steadily. "Please, Rae. Don't act as if I had any choice or—"

"*What* arrangements?"

Hibsen saw, with more pleasure than he had expected to find in anything that day, in that place, that Rae's face was filled with apprehension and the faint foreboding of anger. Well, he thought, *well!* Maybe the kid was getting smart!

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Brabant said shortly: "I made an even trade. Information for our lives. They want to study us — we let them. In exchange, they let us feed ourselves and they promise not to — to —" He faltered, looking at Sam Jaroff.

"They *promise!*" Rae Wensley cried. "What's the matter with you?"

"There's no choice," Brabant protested. "How do you know, maybe with our cooperation they'll learn enough so that they can find a way to get along with the human race! After all, we're as much freaks to them as they to us —they didn't expect to find creatures with the power of star flight any more than we did! Psychologically, we're a complete mystery to them — as much as they are to us — and that's my department, of course. So I've agreed to—"

De Jouvenel snapped: *"To help them conquer Earth."*

"No! To—"

"Don't lie, Brabant!" shouted Marne, his splinted arm forgotten, shouldering his way forward. "Giving aid and comfort to the enemy is treason! You louse, your skin is worth a lot to you, isn't it? But it's worth less to us! You know what treason means?"

"Shut up!" said Brabant. "You don't have a choice. The Gormen—"

"Oh, but we do, headshrinker," interrupted Hibsen at last. He pushed Marne and de Jouvenel aside to face Brabant. "Our choice is cooperation or death — your death, Brabant! And don't think we can't kill you!"

Brabant stood quietly looking at him for a second, then nodded, his expression bleak. "Yes," he said, "I thought you'd get around to that. But you're wrong there too, Hibsen. You can't kill me. The Gormen won't let you."

"They'll never know! Some day when you're not expecting it—"

"They already know," Brabant said, not raising his voice. "Didn't Jaroff tell you? Every last one of them speaks English."

VI

BRABANT and his two Gorman companions had gone, taking Sam Jaroff with them. It had not been a pleasant departure; the old man had screamed terribly, waking the baby, upsetting the orphaned Crescenzi children. But will he, nill he — he had gone, hardly reassured even in part by Brabant's sworn promise that he wouldn't be hurt.

Just as Rae got the two children calm enough to consider a nap, a party of Gormen came rapidly, silently in. Speak English or not, their purpose was not conversation. They fanned out and swiftly, without pause or consultation, began going through every

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single article of food, clothing or equipment in the room.

"Hibsen!" cried Rae at the inner door. "All of you, come here! They're up to something!"

The men came hurrying down and clotted at the doorway, indecisive, but there was nothing for them to do. The aliens didn't touch any person; it was only the inanimate possessions of the party that interested them. And those they went through with the meticulous care of monkeys preening their mates for salt.

"They're searching us," Hibsen said. "Looking for weapons, I guess. Well, that's a laugh! I wish we had some for them to find."

But the Gormen drew a broader line than his. A steel rule that could conceivably be filed to a point, the single glass nursing bottle that Mary had somehow acquired among the one-use plastics (it could be shattered, perhaps), everything that might have an edge or produce a bang was found and confiscated.

"They're thorough enough," Hibsen said bitterly. "All right, let them go ahead. There's nothing we can do about it anyway — now." But they weren't waiting for his permission; they finished their job and stood briefly at the door.

For the first time, Rae Wensley heard one of them speak. It was a thin rabbity squeal, too faint to make much of an impression, but it was clearly a language. There was question and answer, and then half the party left, carrying their few trophies . . .

And the other three came purposefully toward Rae.

She screamed. She couldn't help it; it was too sudden — so sudden that she couldn't stop the scream and barely had time to start it; so sudden that she couldn't hear the sudden shouts from the men, or see how two of the Gormen interposed themselves — fast, fast! — between her and the men, while the other picked her up, as quick, as brisk, as carelessly as a merry-go-round rider snatching the brass ring. Half a second, it seemed, and she had barely caught her breath to scream again and she was already outside, the other Gormen a solid barrier at the door behind her.

SHE was lugged across the square and into a building. Squeaking Gormen were all over the building, more than a score of them, surely, but she didn't have a chance to count or to conjecture on what they were doing, she was carried so swiftly and carelessly up a flight of stairs. The alien who carried her made no sound. However rapidly one foot descended on the tread above the other, it was placed just *there*, with just the right force; it didn't stamp, it didn't stumble. She could hear,

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from the floor above, a human voice, droning a long steady stream, growing louder as she approached.

The Gorman dumped her upright on the floor and vanished, as silent descending the stairs as he had been coming up.

Brabant was in the room. So was Sam Jaroff — it was his voice. He sat half-reclining on an improvised chair, his eyes closed, talking endlessly.

Rae opened her mouth, but Brabant, frowning, shook his head, held a finger to his lips. He seemed mildly surprised to see her, but not very; he didn't, in fact, seem interested in her, only in Jaroff.

"—the one that had a green thing on his shoulder," Jaroff was saying. "A kind of an emblem with three leaves — only not leaves, but sort of swirly things. Like the way fire is drawn coming out of a pinwheel, spinning back. And he was heavier than the other one—about ten per cent, I'd say, or almost; and when they cut my arm, he used both hands, but the other only used his left. The little one in the green room, though, used his right when he put the electrodes around my arm. The thing about *him* was the little box he carried, gold, with eleven white dots and two red ones on the outside, four white in a line, then—"

Jaroff droned on. It was very queer of Dr. Brabant, Rae thought, catching her breath, to be practicing deep recall on the old man in front of the Gormen.

She looked around the room. It was larger than any of those in the house the Gormen had given them for a prison, and it contained things she couldn't recognize but that looked out of place —black metallic things, gold things; Gorman things, most likely. This building was obviously their headquarters, or a part of it. It had a sour reek that, she realized, had been in her nostrils for a long time. She'd thought of it as the smell of Aleph Four, but now she began to wonder. Perhaps it was a Gorman smell.

Then she saw something that was not Gorman.

It was black, but its insides were glass, steel and copper; it had come from the scout rocket. The parts were here! Joy swelled inside her. They were here. Brabant had saved them. No doubt he had a plan. And—

She looked more carefully, and all that was here was a tape recorder, part of the radio equipment, and a few cells from the power pack. Something Brabant was using, no doubt, in whatever it was he was doing. But it wasn't what they needed to make that ship fly.

"—after Skinner died," Jaroff was continuing. "Then I was sick for a long time, because of the

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greenish lumps in the mush, I guess. There were more of them than there were of the purple later on, and they were a little bigger. While I was feverish, the rhino from the green room came eight times and—"

There was a murmur from one of the Gormen and Brabant said, cheerfully enough: "All right, Jaroff. Snap out of it."

The old man woke, blinked, saw the Gormen, and quailed.

"Don't worry," Brabant reassured him. "That's all for today. You can go back to the others now." Jaroff, trembling, walked hesitantly to the door of the room and paused. "Down the stairs. Go ahead. One of the Gormen down there will convoy you to the others. Nothing to be afraid of."

Brabant watched him out of sight, then turned to Rae.

"Well," he said, "I asked them to get Mary Marne, but I suppose one human female looks like another to them. Or maybe my description wasn't so good."

"Sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," said Brabant. He beckoned to her. "Over here. You're next."

IT wasn't the most attractive invitation Rae Wensley had ever had, but there wasn't any choice. She sat where he ordered her.

"Let's see," he said thoughtfully, glancing at the six silent aliens. "I guess we'll start you off with knee jerks. Put these on, Rae." He handed her a set of earphones and bent to tie something with a wire attached to her knee. "Easy," he protested as she jerked away. "This is science."

Self-consciously, Rae put the earphones on. He was bright and cheerful enough, she thought angrily. How *could* he? An hour before, he was being called the worst name in the vocabulary of the human race — a traitor to humanity itself — and now he might have been back on *Explorer II,* light-years from the nearest solid body, giving her the regular psychological check.

"I thought," he said chattily, "that we were going to have to hear Jaroff's entire life history among the Gormen, second by second. Thank heaven they got tired." He nodded toward the silent watchers.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked coldly.

"Why," he said, "suit yourself. It doesn't much matter; this is learning time, Rae." He hesitated. "Come to think of it, yes, there is something I want you to do on the conscious level. The subconscious will take care of itself."

He slipped a reel onto the tape recorder.

"Here," he said, "is a reading of letters of the alphabet, read by

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me. They aren't in A-B-C order but random, or as random as I could make them. What I intend to do with you is conditioning."

"How?"

"The key sentence," he said, "is, 'Mary had a little lamb.' I want you to respond to the letters in that sentence with a knee-jerk, not to any others. Simple? You'll listen to my voice on the recorder, and every time I say one of the letters in that sentence, you'll get a little patellar shock. Not much, but enough to make you twitch. It's elementary enough — Pavlov was doing much more complicated things with dogs a long time ago. And what I want you to do is to repeat the letter you hear, out loud."

"I don't like it."

Brabant grinned tightly. "This is orders from headquarters," he said, and nodded at the six Gormen. "But it won't be painful. Now—"

He turned the switch.

The tape recorder obediently began to whisper the garbled alphabet in her ear.

"K. . . .

"Z. . . .

"R." Brabant, listening on another set, pressed a switch. It was only a little tickling tingle. It startled the girl, but she had to admit that Brabant was right — it didn't hurt. It was, if anything, even less painful than the tap of a doctor's rubber mallet; but it served the same purpose. The toe of her crossed leg involuntarily twitched an inch and a half.

"Good girl," Brabant applauded quickly, as the tape continued to spin.

"D," she heard in the earphones. *Shock.* Again the quick involuntary twitch.

"S . . .

"U . . .

"M." *Shock.*

It went on like that for a good many minutes. Then there was a quick squealing sound from one of the Gormen.

Brabant snapped the switch.

"All right," he said, suddenly morose, "the peanut gallery is getting tired of this particular entertainment. We'll do more of this some other time. Right now—" he hesitated again. "Right now, I think we'd better put you under. Lean back, Rae."

"Hypnosis?" She was startled and fearful. "But—wait a minute! I don't like—"

"Easy," he soothed. "I give you my word, nothing's going to happen. It's just the same sort of thing Jaroff was doing, that's all. So relax, Rae. Relax and rest. Your eyes are getting heavy . . ."

RAE Wensley swam up out of a confused dream. "All right, girl," Brabant was saying, "time to wake up. It's all over."

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She sat up quickly, staring around, her mind chaotic. Five of the Gormen were gone; the sixth, or perhaps it was a totally new one, stood idly near them, patiently waiting.

"Let's go," said Brabant. "You're through for the day. I want to get back to the others."

Rae pulled herself together and went out of the room with Brabant, stooping slightly to avoid the lintel of the door. She was confused, full of puzzlement, and oddly tired. Hypnosis was nothing new to her; it was one of the tools of Brabant's trade. But she wondered what the purpose of the demonstration had been . . . what the silent watching Gormen had made of it . . . and, most of all, what was going on in Brabant's mind.

"All right, we're ready," said Brabant to one of the Gormen below, and the creature glided silently close to them, dogging them out of the building and across the square toward the human jail . . . or cage. It was a gray day, damp and hot.

Brabant said, glancing at the girl: "Thanks. You did fine."

"What did I do?"

He grinned. "Well," he said, guiding her across the threshold of the Gorman headquarters, "you are helping me prove a point. You see, the Gormen don't have any subconscious."

Rae asked stiffly: "So?"

"So they're a very different breed indeed, Rae. There isn't anything that sinks down into the Gorman almost-forgotten, and then turns up as a neurosis, or tic, or *deja vu*. A Gorman doesn't say: 'It's on the tip of my tongue, but I can't quite get it out.' It's always there for him."

"Is that why you told Hibsen they were better than we are?"

"In that sense, yes, they are. Without a subconscious, they don't have most of the other trappings that go with a multi-layered mind. They respond fast because there's nothing to get in their way. They don't have a psychic censor. There isn't anything in their minds that interrupts the thought-and-action sequence. They don't question, they don't doubt, they aren't built to do anything like that. If they knew a thing, they know it; if they don't, they just find it out. Oh, they're curious — that, my dear, is why we're still alive."

"Thank heaven for that much," said the girl, and frowned. "Then does that have something to do with the way their ships are built?"

Brabant nodded. "We need computers for rocket piloting — we aren't fast enough to make the split-second, always-right little decisions that mean the difference between a routine landing and a gory explosion. Computers are fast

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enough to handle the load. And so are these boys. I'd say," he went on earnestly, "that if our friend here—" he nodded at the silent gray alien pacing them— "wanted to hop in that rocket right now and take off, he could do it, given about a minute to figure out the controls. Of course, someone would have to make sure the tanks were filled and so on — and if anything went wrong with the automatic mixers and the other stuff in the combustion system, he wouldn't be any better at fixing them than you or I. He isn't *smarter* than we.

"But he is faster," said Brabant, and checked himself.

BEHIND them, soft footsteps were rapidly shuffling across the deserted square. Rae turned, and Brabant caught her hand.

"Careful," he warned, and she could see that he was worried. It was surprising, but almost pleasurable; at least he wasn't on *totally* easy terms with the Gormen! But Rae was worried too, at the same time; six Gormen were coming toward them at a sort of high-speed waddle, the shambling, distance-devouring gait of the elephant in a hurry. The aliens passed Rae and Brabant by without a glance and disappeared into the jail.

"Come on," said Brabant urgently, and hurried after them. Their own Gorman guard easily kept pace with them, without the appearance of hurry and without a sound. They reached the door and looked inside . . .

Mary Marne knelt bent over her baby, asleep in a crude plaited cradle de Jouvenel had made. She looked up, sprang to her feet.

Twittering faintly to each other, two of the Gormen grabbed her.

Mary gasped with fear. "Please!" she moaned, but they held her fast, and another Gorman's squat hands reached out for her. Snap, snap; it opened the fasteners of her blouse; skillfully, almost cruelly, it slid the zipper of her shorts. It was assault; it was like a crude and perverted rape; the three of them, nothing like human, disrobing the blonde Earth girl — it was a tradition of literature; and, for Mary Marne, it was terror and shame. They stripped her naked as a newborn in less time than Rae, standing helplessly by, could believe; and they poked her, palpated her, prodded her and scrutinized every pore.

The Crescenzi children began to scream, and Mary's husband heard. He came running from the back room.

"Sweet heaven!" he yelled and, hardly pausing at the door, threw himself on the Gormen. But fast as he was, the Gormen were sufficiently faster — more than sufficiently; he didn't have a chance.

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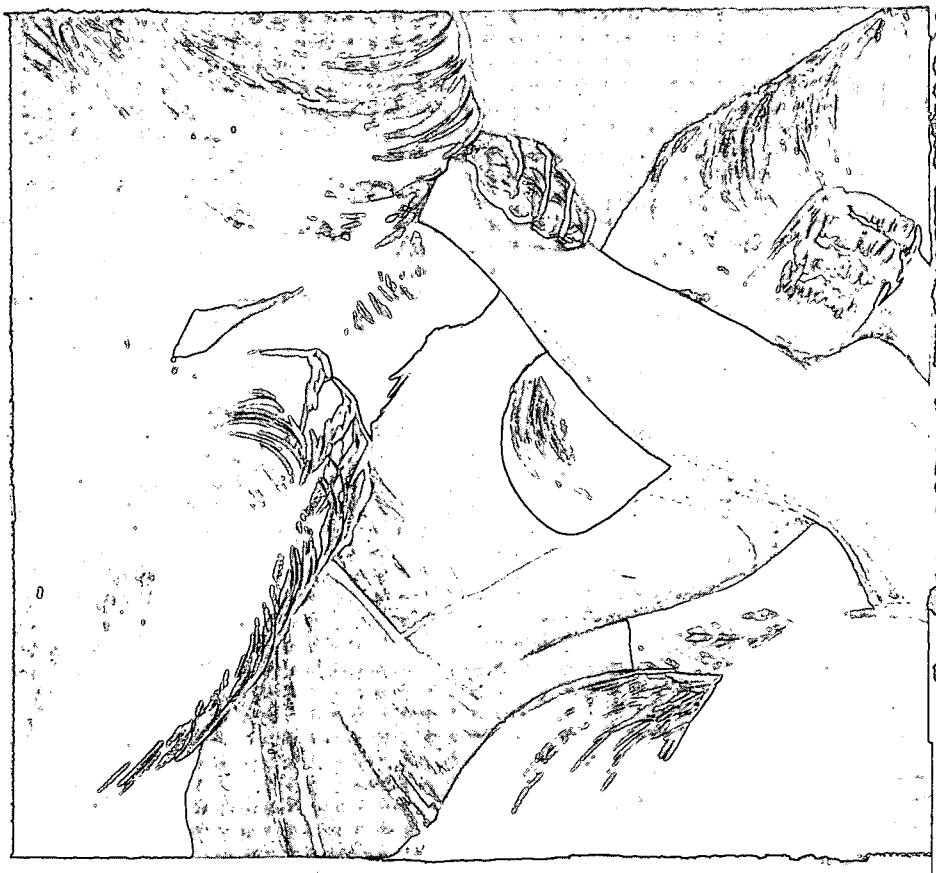

They were between him and his writhing wife before he was through the door; there were six of them, and though three were busy with Mary, the other three were more than enough to handle Marne, and Rae Wensley, and the others who came racing into the room. Marne shouted frantic oaths; they had as much effect as his fists and teeth.

Rae felt Brabant grab her, draw her back. "Marne!" he yelled. "Get a grip on yourself, man! They're not hurting Mary!"

Marne screamed incoherently. He kicked futilely at the alien who had him, sobbed, and glared at

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Brabant. "You rat! What the devil do you mean, they're not —"

And then he stopped, panting for breath. He saw it was true, or true enough. Shame her, discomfort her, strip her naked for everyone to see — yes, all of those things; but that was the extent of the menace in what the Gormen did. They were like children with a kitten. They poked and felt and flexed, but if they gave pain, it was not for the sake of the pain, but an accident of curiosity.

MARNE bellowed: "Mary, are you all right?"

The girl suddenly relaxed. "I—

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I think so. It's kind of — ouch, they pinch — embarrassing. But I don't think they're going to — to kill me or anything."

Marne howled without words. But it was only his husbandly pride and anger now; it was clear that the Gormen's purpose, for the moment at least, was limited to examination.

Brabant said: "That's better, Marne. I rather thought that sooner or later they would want a good look at the comparative anatomy of the female of the species. Though I didn't think it would be quite so public."

Marne cried hoarsely: "Damn you, Brabant! Which side are you on?"

Brabant only nodded, his expression opaque and suddenly absent-minded, like a man not bothering to hear something that doesn't really matter. "I only came around to pick out another subject for my own little studies. Let's see," he said, looking casually around the room. "I think I'd better take—"

But he didn't get to say, just then, who it was he had selected. The Gormen finished with the person of Mary Marne. They set her down on her feet — not roughly, not gently, merely quickly — and returned her clothes. Then, ignoring her, they twittered briefly at each other and started without pause for her baby.

It was the first time a human had ever caught a Gorman off guard.

The little knot of men, already on edge, didn't stop to think or argue. They jumped, without warning. And the first Gorman was bowled over before he could raise his stubby hands to protect himself. There was a loud, shrill twittering from all the aliens, the most noise Rae had ever heard them make, and roars of sudden rage and triumph from the men. The other Gormen, the ones not immediately involved, reached quickly into pouches in their thick skins — for what, Rae could only guess, but the guess was frightening. It might have been death and devastation right then, if those stubby hands had come out with guns —

BRABANT shouted frantically: "Wait, you fools! Hold it! They won't hurt the baby! They only want to examine it!"

Maybe it wouldn't have stopped the men, but it slowed them down. The Gormen needed no more.

The alien that had been hurled to the floor bounced up again like a ball; the others knotted together, poised.

The men drew back.

The brief rebellion was over. But all the humans stood there, eyes burning with anger, while the Gormen picked the child up,

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stripped it as quickly and efficiently as they had its mother.

The baby screamed. Well, babies do scream when they are awakened suddenly; it doesn't mean pain, only surprise. And indeed the aliens were oddly gentle with him. Where they had left purplish bruises on Mary's pale skin, they were tender with the infant.

Aliens, monsters, call them whatever you like, Rae Wensley thought, it was clear that they knew the difference between an adult and a newborn.

It took very little time; then he was back in his plaited crib, still naked but no longer crying very much, and the Gormen, with a few twitters among themselves, were gone.

The atmosphere around Dr. Brabant had turned ugly.

He didn't seem to notice. He was staring thoughtfully at a blank wall, as though all of this were really not happening, as though he were pondering ink-blots in a study back on Earth. He seemed preoccupied, Rae thought, and somehow faintly pleased.

But all he said at last was: "Well, so much for that. Meanwhile, I've got work to do for our friends. Oh, one thing. You aren't restricted to this place any more. You can wander around outside if you like — though you'll have company, of course."

VII

SEVERAL light-seconds away, and getting farther all the time, Captain Serrell hung at the conn-room periscope, watching the tangled cocoon of steel cable that linked the trailer to its tractor.

Steel is elastic. In free-fall, the stretched cables had a tendency to snap back, not much, but enough to start the nine-hundred-foot tractor and the larger, lighter trailer moving slowly back toward each other, kinking the cables, bringing the radioactive reactor nozzles dangerously close.

"Take it easy, Lanny!" the captain ordered impatiently. "You're getting too damned close to the hot zone!"

Young Lanny, aggrieved, said over the radio: "Sorry, Captain." But he had known perfectly well what he was doing. Captain Serrell, through the periscope, watched the spacesuited boy swing his pusher around and ease the ponderous mass out again, toward the limit of its tether. His very posture showed annoyed dignity.

Captain Serrell sighed and cranked the periscope around again to look at Aleph Four. His nerves were on edge. Lanny Davis was a good boy — man, the captain corrected himself; Lanny was twenty-one now. He had been only twelve when *Explorer II* began to swim slowly away from its orbit

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around the orbiting Earth, untangling its nearly Ptolemaic web of cycles and epicycles by craft and immaculate navigation as it set course for the star system that included the habitable satellite, Aleph Four. But now he was a man, and *Explorer II* circled Aleph's primary itself.

It was a singularly helpless feeling, Captain Serrell told himself, scanning the featureless clouds, to be drawing farther and farther away from his two scout rockets down there. It couldn't be helped. *Explorer* didn't have the massive thrust it would have needed to risk an orbit around the satellite itself, or even around Aleph, the Jupiter-sized planet that was first out from its primary.

Too crowded, too many bodies clutching at the weak tractor-trailer combination. If incautiously they had blundered too close to one of them, that might have been the end for the whole ship. And therefore, doubtless, of the colony, for without the vast stores aboard the mother ship, yet to be ferried down, the colonists would have terribly rough going.

And what, Serrell asked himself, do they have now?

HE kicked back to his desk, pulled himself into his seat, made a mark on his calendar with a tethered pencil. Four days. No word. No radio. No returning rocket. And *Explorer* spinning hourly farther away.

What in the name of heaven was going on?

The microphone on his desk buzzed. "Captain Serrell, navigation room."

He snapped a switch. "What is it?"

The voice from the navigation room said doubtfully: "Captain, we hooked up a photo-cell trigger system with the scanning scopes, to look for rocket exhausts, just like you said. And it went off a couple of seconds ago. Andy's tracking down the tapes now."

Serrell's heart gave an enormous leap. Rocket exhausts! If the alarm had spotted rocket exhausts, it would mean — it *had* to mean! — that at least one of the scouts was on its way back!

"Hurry up!" he yelled, past caring that he was giving superfluous orders; the news was too good to wait. "How long's it going to take? I've got Aleph Four in the periscope now—think I can see them?"

"Well," said the voice, puzzlingly worried, and faded away. Then it came back, stronger and — more worried.

"No, Captain," apologized the voice from the navigation room, "I'm afraid you can't. Andy's got the tapes now. The rockets — well, they aren't coming from Aleph Four, Captain. They're coming from the other planet, Bes."

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DOWN below, Hibsen tested his freedom. He nodded to de Jouvenel, who got up and followed him out the door. "Let's see how far we can go. Suppose we take a look around the rocket, for a starter."

"All right." But that was a little more than they were allowed. Two Gormen swooped silently after them, and though Hibsen and de Jouvenel walked rapidly enough, the Gormen were at the rocket before them, solid chunks of gray flesh barring the port.

Hibsen said: "Okay, we'll try something else. Let's wander off. Maybe only one of them will follow. Then we can split up and—"

But both Gormen followed. The two men walked over the softly bouncing paving, turned a corner, walked a few squares, turned again. The rocket was out of sight: the sound of the Gormen moving about, their voices, their machines, had all faded. Apart from their own muted footsteps and a faint whisper of motion from the trailing Gormen, the world was empty of sound.

"Split," whispered Hibsen harshly, and obediently the little dark man chose a street at random and disappeared into it. The Gormen split too, one after de Jouvenel, one trailing Hibsen.

Hibsen rubbed his star sapphire angrily. The confounded things, if only they'd get rough, shout, show anger, act *human*. But they weren't human, and perhaps they showed it most in the utter dispassionate coolness of their surveillance. They didn't seem to care how far their charges led them. They didn't object to what must obviously be an attempt to lose them.

They only followed.

"Then follow, damn you!" Hibsen whispered, and lengthened his stride.

When Hibsen strolled, the Gorman strolled. When Hibsen moved faster, the Gorman, tied to an invisible, inelastic string, moved exactly as fast, stayed exactly as close.

Hibsen, anger seething in him, began to run. The Gorman — no, not *ran* — but shuffled faster, as fast as Hibsen, an even five yards behind, no matter how Hibsen forced his wearying legs and struggled for every burning breath. He broke into a dead gallop and kept it up for two hundred yards — and the Gorman stayed that same five yards behind.

And when Hibsen flung himself, heart pounding, lungs agonized, to the ground, the Gorman stood stock-still above him. And, without pausing to catch a breath, made notes.

Hibsen lay there, sobbing. It was infuriating and humiliating, but he made himself do it. He lay there at the alien's feet, face to the ground, only one eye open just

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enough to gauge the creature's mood and stance.

Then, without warning, he flung himself up and at the gray shape.

No warning — or none that Hibsen himself could measure, but there must have been some, for the Gorman was ready. Some insignificant tightening of a muscle, something hardly noticeable, but enough. Before Hibsen was fully on his feet, the Gorman had put his metallic "notebook" in the fleshy pouch that might have been skin and might have been a garment, and before Hibsen had quite turned to face him, the Gorman's arms were cocked like a boxer's. Too late, too late, Hibsen sobbed silently, but he flung himself on the alien anyway — and was knocked across the sidewalk.

It was as easy as that.

All the way back to their common jail, Hibsen clutched his aching face and swore to himself. He didn't look around. He didn't have to. He knew what was there. He knew it was always going to be there, as long as they were on this planet, and maybe Brabant was right: maybe — in some ways, at least — the Gormen were better men than the humans were.

VIII

RAE Wensley sat restive in Brabant's laboratory, waiting for Brabant to get to her. At the moment, he was busily conferring with one of the Gormen — the old one, the one that seemed to be in charge of Keeping an Eye on Brabant. She was glad for the chance to sit and watch Brabant, for there were many questions in her mind about him. But she couldn't sit still all the same.

Too much was happening.

Brabant had deliberately cut himself off from contact with the rest of the humans. There was no other explanation. She had tried to talk to him and he wouldn't talk. She had tried to defend him, but Devil's Advocate is a thankless job when the Dev — when Brabant wouldn't lift a finger in his own defense. She had no reason to defend him, no reason at all to care.

But how worn and haggard he looked!

He came over to her at last and said shortly: "All right, Rae, let's get going. Same as before. Put on the earphones."

"Again? We've done this fifty times—"

"And we'll do it fifty more if I say so! Hurry up, Rae."

Stiffly she sat down, not looking at him. It was a wearisome, nonsensical business! How childish of him to carry on with it — and how childish of the Gormen to continue to be interested. Or amused. Or whatever it was they were that made them go on watch-

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ing and taking their interminable notes. True, Brabant did have the wit to vary the procedure from day to day, so that sometimes she was asked to repeat the letters she heard aloud, sometimes to write them, sometimes merely to sit and listen, and suffer the mild electric tingle of the band on her knee. But it had been some days since he had bothered to give her shocks.

"Today," he said, "I've got a treat for you." She looked at him warily. "I want you to repeat every letter you hear, and I'll let you watch your foot."

Rae looked away hotly.

"You understand?" he demanded.

"Certainly I understand." She had, after all, a higher I.Q. than a rhesus monkey, and those had been given similar tests, she knew; Brabant had told her that.

"Right," he beamed. "You hear an A, you say A. That's all." He seemed almost happy. *Happy!* Everything he did, she thought miserably, was an affront.

Perhaps it was only the detached attitude of the scientist, she told herself, but without conviction. And in any case, as Brabant had not failed to remind her — often — there wasn't any choice. If the trained seals wanted fish, they would have to snort out *Yankee Doodle* on the pipes.

Rae sat somnolently in her chair, watching her own toe, as the tape began to whisper in her ear. "A," it said, and "A," she repeated obediently, while the toe danced an inch.

"Good enough," said Brabant, nodding. "Now we lower the volume. Keep going, Rae."

"All right."

THE little voice in her ear whispered fainter and fainter. It began to be hard to hear. She forgot her toe, staring into space, straining to get it right. "R . . . L . . . D — no. T, I think."

"Just say the first letter that comes to you!" he ordered impatiently.

"But—"

"Do as I say! If you aren't sure, guess!"

"All right." She was angry now. "Y . . . A . . . P — oh! That's funny!" Quickly her mind scanned the sentence: *Mary had a little lamb.* There was no P in the sentence.

But her foot had twitched.

"I told you," Brabant crowed.

She stared. He was looking, not at her, but at the Gorman, which made rapid notes.

"What — what's going on? Did the conditioning blow a gasket?"

He told her with self-satisfaction: "Not at all."

"But that last letter was a P and—"

"It was a B. You were sure,

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but you were wrong! Consciously you heard P; that's what you said. But your subconscious — it was sure, too, only it was *right*. Your subconscious hears better than the front of your mind, Rae."

She said worriedly: "I don't know what that proves."

"It proves," said Brabant, "the existence of the subconscious — which hears with its own ear, sees with its own eye — and is not disturbed by the errors of the conscious mind."

"Proves it to me, to you, or to the Gormen?" she asked.

"Why, to all of us," he answered enthusiastically. "Can't you realize what a challenge it is to have to *demonstrate* the existence and functions of a subconscious to a race that doesn't have any? The concept doesn't mean a thing to them. All they can understand is proof, concrete proof, as tangible as it can possibly be. And with them checking me every inch of the way — Lord, what an opportunity! Don't you *see?*"

She stared at him.

Weeks and weeks of this — not merely the tape-recorder chanting the alphabet, but hypnosis, deep recall, heaven knew what; not only for her, but for nearly every member of the human party. And for what?

She said tightly, furiously: "What do you think you're doing?" Her own voice surprised her. It rasped with harsh emotion.

It surprised Brabant, too. "But I've already told you."

She said: "Look at that thing! It's taking everything in, everything you can give it — more than they could hope to learn in a dozen years, starting from scratch! Brabant, don't you know what the Gormen are going to *do* with the knowledge you give them?"

The alien made a slight movement. Brabant looked at it and shook his head. Then he turned back to the girl.

"Why, yes," he said, "I suppose I do."

"They want it to—"

"You don't have to tell me. They want to use it to conquer Earth." He grinned self-consciously. "As the old psychiatry joke put it — that's *their* problem."

SHE couldn't help herself; the instant she was back with the others she told them, every word. It was like trying to vomit up a poison, cast it out, get rid of it, but merely saying it didn't get it out of her system; it continued to stay inside her and burn.

"Council of war," said Hibsen dangerously. "Mary, you and the kids stay here."

They trooped into one of the back rooms, the silent Gorman at the door remaining uncaring behind. Hibsen, grim-faced, laid the proposition before the house: "He

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has no right to live." Hibsen muted his voice with a powerful effort. His jaw was still painful, but he was past caring about that, though it hurt him especially much to talk. "Brabant's gone over to the Gormen — he admits it! Treason is a capital crime. Brabant's got to die."

Rae listened through a fog of weariness. She had been up with the children that morning; she had gone through a grueling hour with a demanding Brabant and a stolid, worrisome Gorman; and she had felt terror inside her when Brabant admitted he knew what the Gormen planned. It had been a wearing day, but, more than that, there was a pain and anger inside her more than she could bear.

This was *Brabant* they were talking about. Brabant, whom she loved — or had once loved — or wished to love, if only things could be smoothed out so that it was just the two of them. Love is many things; it is a biological call and also a gestalt of social attitudes and standings; and whatever the biology between them might have been, however fine and good, or crushing and destroying, it was the certain fact that every person in that room but her wanted to see Brabant dead.

Every person but her?

But she was the one who had brought them the one bit of evidence they needed. And what did she want? Rae looked around the room at the others, hotly arguing in undertones. They were a queer lot, she thought regretfully; it was hardly fair that eight billions of mankind on the rich and teeming Earth should depend for their future security on what action this handful of people here might take to muzzle one person across the square.

In spite of the Qualifying Tests, in spite of Brabant's care, those who voyaged between the stars were likely to develop strange cancers of the personality. Half the people in the room, she counted, had been up and down like yo-yos during the voyage — manic, and then tranquilized; depressive, and then stimulated. Chemistry did it — part of it; Brabant, with his tests and his therapy, did the rest.

But now they were going to kill Brabant, weren't they? And maybe, she thought wearily, there was something to think about there. Brabant had kept them all in one piece . . .

But who had kept Brabant from chaos?

NOT herself, she thought, aching, though she had been more than willing. (But Brabant had explained that to her, tenderly enough. He couldn't. Alone among the ship, he couldn't become emotionally involved. He

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couldn't make close friends, even, not until the trip was over; to do so would destroy his usefulness.)

And now it was too late, of course, because they had already passed sentence. The decision was to execute. The problem was only one of ways and means.

"Not a chance," Hibsen was saying. "You can't get him alone to do it, de Jouvénel. He wouldn't trust you or me. Marne?"

The lieutenant rubbed his splinted arm. "All right."

"Do you think you can manage it?" Marne grunted. "Good enough," said Hibsen, satisfied. "Then all we need is a weapon. Who's got anything we can use?"

Silence for a moment. Then, slowly, Rae Wensley felt herself raising her hand.

Hibsen started. "You, Rae?"

"It's sewing scissors, really," she said faintly. "But sharp."

Hibsen grinned with lean approval. Almost she saw tufts of hair at the tips of his ears and needle teeth dripping saliva. Undoubtedly it was giving Hibsen a lot of pleasure to hear her volunteer to help remove the man she had turned him down for.

But de Jouvenel said abruptly: "Never mind, Rae. I've got the real thing." They looked at him. The little dark man said without emphasis: "I was here before most of you. I had an idea something like this would come up. So . . . Anyway, it's my own knife, and right at the moment it's under the Marne baby's mattress."

Rae stared. She had wondered why the little man had been so solicitous of the child. The plaited cradle was his; many times he had helped her change the bedding, pet the baby to sleep, and for what warped and lethal reasons, she was just now able to know. But at least, she thought with gratitude, it would not be her weapon that killed Brabant.

HIBSEN said: "That's good. Fine. Now how do we work it? Rae, it never occurred to me that you'd help, because — Never mind. Since you're willing, maybe you can help get him alone with Marne. Got any ideas on how we can arrange that?"

She stood numbly, trying to think. Ideas? Oh, she was full of ideas, but not the sort Hibsen had in mind. Her ideas were pictures and memories and dreams, and she had to leaf them over in her mind — now — because soon they would be gone, or spoiled.

Marne said, scratching his jaw: "How about this? I'll wait upstairs. Rae tells him she wants to talk to him or something — maybe acts a little affectionate, you know? And then I'll be waiting. We can tell the Gormen we were fighting over her. Maybe that will confuse them a little. We owe it to Earth

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to try to mix them up as much as we can."

He was discussing the thing quite reasonably, she thought in frozen distress, like a man planning an evening of bridge rather than a prospective murder. No, execution. That was the word, since they had calmly and reasonably passed sentence. It was all very reasonable, she thought drearily; there wasn't any point at which a person could stop and cry out: This is all wrong! You're proposing to destroy a human life!

Hibsen was saying: "The Gormen will take it hard, of course, so maybe Marne's idea is a good one. But let's not kid ourselves. They won't be easy to fool. But we'll have to face that when we come to it. I don't think they'll do anything about hostages or reprisals — they don't seem to think along those lines. Still, Brabant is the only person who has established real contact with them, and we ought to consider what they're likely to—"

From the other room, Mary Marne warned: "Watch it! They're coming!"

IN came a party of Gormen, six of them, armed, moving along like iceskaters, without fuss or noise. And with them was Dr. Brabant.

Rae stepped back involuntarily. Brabant had been harried and worn, on the edge of desperation, that afternoon; now he had passed the edge. His face was sallow. His hands twitched. His eyes were the eyes of crucified Christ; but what he said could have come only from the lips of Judas. In a voice of torment, he said: "You'll have to give your plan up. Sorry, but the Gormen and I know what you're up to, and they won't let you."

Silently, the aliens fanned out, surrounding the humans, forcing them toward the front room.

Brabant said: "Those of you who have managed to keep weapons, you'll have to turn them over now."

And he knew where to look. They went into the room where the children were sleeping and turned back the thin soggy mattress under the baby, and there was de Jouvenel's knife.

"Rae," said Brabant commandingly, and two of the Gormen advanced toward her.

"Never mind," she said hastily, and fumbled in her clothes for the sewing scissors.

Brabant accepted them and passed them to one of the aliens.

He looked around. "That's it," he said at last, still in that torn and inwardly raging tone.

He didn't look at Rae, but he met the eyes of the others easily enough.

"From now on," he said, "there won't be any more chances for

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any of you — either to kill me or to escape. Sorry," he added politely, "but that's the way it is. We're leaving here."

"What the devil are you talking about?" Hibsen demanded, his voice cracking.

"We're leaving in two days," said Brabant, nodding slightly, like a professor glad a student has asked a question that helps him to move a discussion along. "The Gormen have been waiting for a big ship that will hold all of us. It's on its way. They're going to take us — I don't know where, ultimately. Maybe Bes. Maybe farther. But the first stop, I think, is *Explorer II*."

He paused, in the sudden absolute stillness. "Yes," he said thoughtfully, "that's what they're going to do . . . Rae."

She jumped.

"Will you come outside with me for a moment?"

She glanced instinctively at Hibsen for orders — then quickly away. *That* was cruel. Conspiring to execute Brabant was one thing, but asking another man's permission to walk with him was, somehow, worse.

For reasons she couldn't have elucidated and didn't stop to think out, she said: "All right."

THEY went out into the street, she and Brabant and the Gormen. Brabant said, oddly diffident: "Let's go for a walk."

"A walk?"

He nodded, avoiding her eyes. They were never allowed to walk outside at night.

"With one of *them* for a chaperon?"

Brabant shook his head, and, true enough, all of the Gormen were moving away, swiftly and without a backward glance.

"Ah," she said, suddenly enraged, "I see! You betray your companions, and your payoff is a longer leash to your collar. I suppose it's worth it!"

"Rae."

His voice was dull, not begging, hardly even protesting, but she wouldn't listen. She shrugged and walked slowly down the street. The darkness was nearly absolute. It was impossible to see even the outlines of the buildings ahead, but she could see lights behind them from the human quarters.

When she could no longer make out Brabant's face, she said: "All right, we're walking. What do you want?"

"A fair break," Brabant said immediately.

"You fool!"

"No, wait! I—" But the time had passed, if ever there had been a time. Rae couldn't stand it. No, she told herself, agonized, this is *wrong*. And she turned and ran headlong back through the dark streets.

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Out of nowhere, a Gorman materialized to follow her.

Brabant hesitated.

He glanced at the vague silhouette of the remaining Gorman — out of earshot but, he had always known, not out of sight. No, they didn't trust him *that* much. He squared his shoulders and returned — not to the house where the others were quartered, of course; not even to his laboratory, where he had been permitted to sleep for a while, but to a thin pad on an upper floor of the Gorman barracks. He had been sleeping there for three nights now, on orders, and he didn't like it. It represented a deterioration in his relationship with the Gormen.

If things went on this way, he thought wildly, he wouldn't have a friend in either camp.

AND time passed, and time passed. Rae went through the hours without seeing faces or hearing words. Brabant came and went, more tired every time, more remote, selecting his guinea pigs with a jerk of a thumb, and the Gormen who were with him always now obligingly formed guard and marched his chosen subjects away. Rae found it impossible to sleep. Merely to try was punishment, for the moment the head went down and the eyes closed, then tears started. But time passed.

"You, Rae," said Brabant's voice, and she looked up, startled; she had been sitting staring at the Marne baby and had somehow managed to attain that total emptiness called Nirvana. "You come along. And Hibsen and de Jouvenel, I have a special treat for all of you."

Hibsen said six words, one a preposition and the other five obscene.

"Yes, I know," said Brabant remotely. "Come along."

He marched off, not looking back. He didn't have to see if they were following; the Gormen were there for that. He marched his subjects across the square and to the base of the hidden Gorman rocket.

"I want," he said, "to show you what you're up against. In you go."

He glanced at them. Their expressions were amusingly surprised, though no one on all that planet, just then, was amused.

"It's all right," said Brabant. "I've got permission from the Gormen. We'll have company, never fear. But they don't really need to watch us. That's what I want you to see."

De Jouvenel trailed him, and the girl and Hibsen followed. Hibsen said flatly: "I'd kill you if I could. You know that."

Brabant nodded. It wasn't worth an answer, it was so obviously

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true. "Here," he said, "this is the control room. Sit down, Hibsen."

"In *that?*" Hibsen was honestly shocked.

"Or stand if you like. But look around."

Hibsen forgot to be murderous. His eyes were wide open for the first time in days; his curiosity had mastered him. He looked about him like a child in storyland. Hibsen was a pilot of spaceships, and not even the blinding hatred he bore for Brabant could keep him from being interested in a strange ship built by a strange race.

A spaceship is the simplest of machines. You push something out of one end, the ship squirts away in the opposite direction, that's all. No moving parts (in schematic design), no complications, no possible variations of construction, no matter by whom designed or where. How can there be, as an analogy, more than one way to go Up?

That's the theory. The practice . . .

HIBSEN'S heart shriveled in him. He found himself caressing the star sapphire, rubbing an unsure finger over the gold braid. This was the ship he and de Jouvenel had thought to steal. What Brabant had said was all too true.

It was no more possible for a human to walk in and operate a ship like this than for a monkey to punch out a Shakespeare sonnet by random thumping of a typewriter.

De Jouvenel said faintly behind him, "Sweet heaven. There's nothing here."

It was plain fact. There were, for example, no such things as: triple-gyro attitude indicator, linked through selsyn motors to a homeostatic negative-feedback course corrector; self-compensating thrust control, capable of measuring the minute variations of squirt of each component in each mixing chamber and increasing or decreasing the flow of fuel appropriately; feedback-aligned course plotter, able to read a tape which dictated the parameters of all possible orbits which would take one from *here* to *there*, to select the best of them, to put the ship on it and keep it there and to discard that orbit and select another, without pause or faltering, if for any reason of failure of parts, motion of objective, interposition of obstacle (*i.e.*, meteorite, astronomical body, other vessel) the chosen orbit became unsuitable and it was necessary to change.

There was, in other words, no smoothly humming Black Box. There was no compensator that could measure all of these things and balance them one against another. There was no standby cir-

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cuit to compensate for the ultimate failure of all, the failure of the compensator.

There was, instead, only —

Item: An artificial horizon. (It was a thin jet of mercury, impinging on a spider's orb-web of wires marked in circles and radians, the whole reflected in a ninety-degree mirror into the pilot's eyes.)

Item: A porthole. Yes, a porthole. A glassed-in nose cone to look out of. Radar, periscopes, photocell detectors? No. Nothing like that.

And, item: Eight little rings, one to fit each of the eight fingers of a Gorman's two hands, each one of which controlled the flow of fuel to one jet.

There were those and there was nothing else.

"You see?" demanded Brabant irritably.

"I see," said Hibsen after a pause, his hand clinging to the star sapphire. "I—"

He stopped. There was nothing to say. "You want us to go now, Brabant?"

"Not you," said Brabant shortly. "Rae, de Jouvenel, you can go back. Hibsen I want to stay here. You've had your treat. Now I need you for a little more guinea-pigging. And," he said over his shoulder, turning his back on all of them, "maybe now you'll see the wisdom of my advice. Give up. It's all over."

IX

BUT it wasn't all over. Not really. There was one more act on the program, that program which Brabant had carefully contrived in the silent hours watching over the injured Lt. Marne, just after the first landing.

Brabant squatted on his thin, sour-smelling pad in the pre-dawn darkness, looking at a window that showed only the faintest difference in shade from the wall around it.

In the past few days, the Gormen had made it adequately clear that his work for them was just about at an end. What they wanted to know, they knew. The mine had been worked; the tailings were decreasingly valuable and soon they would decide to terminate the operation. At that point —

There were other things the Gormen wanted to know about Earthmen than how their minds worked, and though they'd learned some of them from Jaroff and the late Chapman, they would proceed as rapidly as possible to learn the rest. The psyche digested, the soma would be next to be studied. Equally thoroughly. And with a great deal more carelessly distributed pain.

Dr. Brabant felt sick and empty inside.

It wasn't only the reasonable prospect of laboratory-animal dissection that worried him. It was

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something more. It was the knowledge that if all the humans died, all but one of them would die hating him.

Brabant did not enjoy being hated.

In his profession, the position was not unfamiliar. Brabant's job was to keep the mind in balance, and in the process of adjustment, a great deal of free-floating hatred clung to the psychologist in charge. (So did love.) He had made himself apart and — more or less — independent of the temporary emotional states of those around him; that was the way the job was done.

But now he was utterly, utterly, *completely* alone. On all this planet, there was not one soul who loved, respected or trusted him, not even the orphaned Crescenzi children, who had taken to running and hiding from him when he came near.

Brabant sighed, and then, abruptly, sat tensely erect.

There was a subdued twittering and motion on the floor below. Brabant frowned. What he knew of the Gormen more than anything else was that they were reliably creatures of habit; it was not their habit to arise before full light. He listened carefully, but there was nothing to hear that did him any good, only the fact that, for some reason, the barracks was early awake. Gradually he relaxed, but without ceasing to frown . . . he seldom ceased to frown anyhow, these days.

He thought wistfully of the rest of the party, huddled together in the building across the square, hardly a hundred yards away. At least they had each other. Though it was his job to keep them stable, and though in the course of it he learned more about their weaknesses, faults and subdued internal evils than most of them knew themselves, Brabant liked — loved — no, *needed* them; needed their regard and their warmth. They were his friends. They were all he had.

TIME was when Brabant, new at the job, had dreamed with regret of the possible high-stability, non-neurotic personnel an interstellar flight might — *should* — enlist. But you had to take what you could get; that was the law. Brabant hadn't made that law. Actually, the law had been made by herbalists, ratified by surgery, and confirmed by Alexander Fleming and the pharmaceutical houses. Modern medicine, over a good many generations, had saved so many lives that it had enforced a general lowering of psychological standards in favor of some rather special physical ones.

An Rh baby in a modern hospital was a trivial happenstance in a dull morning's routine; on an

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alien planet, without endless blood of every conceivable type (not to mention accessories) the same happenstance was — a dead baby. Colonists could not afford, simply could not afford, to carry in their genes and chromosomes the risk of an Rh-negative response — or of sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia, agammaglobulinemia — you name it.

Hardly a child was born on Earth that did not receive at least one tender flick of a scalpel — to correct a squint, tighten a ventricle, ease a pyloric stenosis or whatever — in its first months of life. On Aleph Four, that scalpel might not be there. Sure, a doctor or two went with each party, but if something happened to the doctor? The risk could not be borne.

And so Part One of the Qualifying Tests was a rigorous genetic study, and the passing grade was 100%. And that eliminated very many of those who were willing to apply. The ones that were left had to be combed for—no, not the utterly stable; the utterly stable organism, being satisfied, stays where its roots are dug in — but for those nearest stable, or those who could be kept stable for the purposes of their job.

Like Hibsen. Given the security he wore on his jacket and a job that he knew he could do, Hibsen was hard, bright, aggressive and able. Take those things away and Hibsen was something else again; but those things weren't meant to be taken from him — wouldn't have been, except for the Gormen . . .

And Brabant liked Hibsen.

He liked them all — needed them — and, yes, loved them. Neurotic or not. Stable or not. With warmth toward Brabant himself or not; and at that moment, he wryly knew, it most decidedly was not.

A DISTANT metallic scream made him look up. It was daylight now, and the noise was coming from outside and *up*.

Brabant jumped to his feet and pressed against the window, trying to see what was outside his field of view. Something was coming. The scream grew louder and louder; it thundered and blared.

Light — flame — thrust down out of the clouds.

"It's here," whispered Brabant, held to the window, staring; and he watched as the hugest of all imaginable ships dropped, flame-tailed, out of the clouds.

It settled into the square outside, next to the dismantled Terrestrial scout, with a wash of fire that made Brabant avert his eyes and scorched the rock walls. It was a towering brute of a ship, more than two hundred feet tall — bigger than the trailer of *Explorer II*, silently orbiting out in

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space – bigger than any vessel the human race had yet been able to transport from Sol to another star. In the Solar System itself, big ships were by no means uncommon, but even there this one would have been a monster. It was all one piece, and that piece towered higher than a twenty-story building.

Brabant took his hands away from his eyes and squinted out at the giant. Gormen already were hurrying out to its base; that explained, at least, why the barracks had arisen so early that morning. It was the ship they had been waiting for, the one big enough to carry all the humans to—wherever the Gormen proposed to take them.

"All right," Brabant whispered crazily, dizzy with fatigue and shaking with nerves, "you've come. I hope I'm ready for you."

And before noon of that day, they were embarked. Brabant, for his services to the captors, had the job of straw boss.

"Come on, come on," he said tightly, looking at no one, "move along, get aboard." And the humans moved toward the ship, carrying what they could.

Hibsen and de Jouvenel, glowering, mumbled loud enough for Brabant to hear, but he wouldn't look at them. Mary Marne and her husband came, carrying the child, Mary near to tears and the

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child already howling. Retty and the two Crescenzi children, tear-streaked and clinging; Sam Jaroff, his eyes wide with horror like a man floating on a wide sea, who sees the rescuing vessel steam carelessly away. And last of all Rae Wensley, and if Brabant didn't meet her eyes, neither did she look at Dr. Howard Brabant.

"Inside," grumbled Brabant, following along.

One Gorman was with them, silent, motionless and armed. He was enough. The Gorman hand weapon was a rapid-fire flame ejector. In that confined space, he could easily kill every one of them before the first could quite make up his mind to move.

The rest of the Gormen were busy with more important things — looting the scout rocket, carrying what probably were records and equipment from their headquarters to the square.

"*Judas!*" hissed de Jouvenel as he went by.

Brabant did not turn. He was staring into space.

INSIDE the rocket, Rae Wensley leaned against a cold brassy bulkhead, half closing her eyes. The Gorman reek soured the air around her. They were in a bare chamber; whatever the Gormen themselves liked in the way of creature comforts, they had provided nothing at all for their captives. It looked like a long, uncomfortable trip.

And the destination would be the worst part of it.

Brabant glanced at the girl. She might have been speaking aloud; every thought she had was written on her face.

All right, Howard, he said to himself, what are you waiting for? Everybody was aboard. One Gorman stood there and no others; if there was ever going to be a moment, the moment was now. But he couldn't help waiting a second, just another second, like a gambler with the rent money standing hypnotized before the pari-mutuel window; the risk was great, and it was hard, hard to make himself go ahead . . .

But something took over for him.

Brabant found himself standing next to the Gorman. He reached into his frayed blouse and took out the knife the Gormen had commandeered from Hibsen, that Brabant himself had commandeered from the Gormen.

"Here," he said. The alien looked at him and twittered, but accepted the knife. "And — oh, yes," said Brabant, licking his lips, "I think they've got another. In the same place."

Twitter, twitter. Gorman-accented English was hard to follow at best.

"Yes," nodded Brabant, "in the

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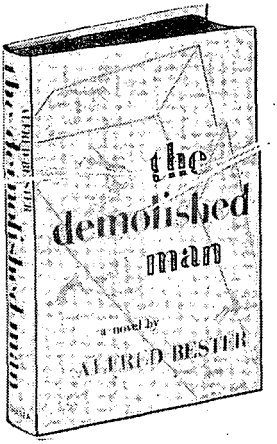

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same place, under the baby." He closed his eyes for a second.

When he looked up, the Gorman was moving rapidly toward the baby, the knife in one hand, the other outstretched for the child.

"Dear God," cried Brabant, the words a prayer, "he's going to kill the baby!"

Kill the baby — kill the baby. The words rolled around the metal chamber. Everything stopped.

The Gorman half-turned, the expression almost humanly surprised, but it didn't matter. There wasn't a second's hesitation; there was no time for thought. Marne leaped at the alien as quickly as any Gorman. It was reflex that moved him, not thinking. He was on top of the rhino before even that super-fast creature could whirl, and half a dozen of the others were right behind.

The Gorman was out cold, under a hundred blows, before he could lift the knife; he never even started for the gun; that massive skull could endure pounding, but the brain beneath was subject to syncope like any human's; he was unconscious. It was the second time the humans had surprised a Gorman, and the first when it had mattered.

The fighters jumped back, triumphant and amazed.

"We — we got him!" gasped Hibsen, unbelieving.

Brabant, weary but ready, dug into his worn pockets for the other essential ingredient of his plan.

"Here!" he said, holding out a thin wire coil. "Tie him up, Hibsen! De Jouvenel — close that port!"

X

THE bound Gorman lay on the floor, its eyes open; it had not stayed unconscious long. Outside scrabblings against the port said that the other Gormen were suspicious. And Rae Wensley cried out: "Brabant! I thought you told me they wouldn't hurt the baby!"

Brabant was breathing raggedly; he looked utterly spent. But the hangdog expression was gone from his eyes, the crucified look from his face; he was almost triumphant. He said: "That's right, Rae. He was only searching for another knife."

"But—"

"But I lied to you, yes! *We need this ship.* We couldn't plan to jump him—nothing could make us do it fast enough; the second's lag in our thinking would give him plenty of warning. So I had to make you attack him — without thinking — as fast as a Gorman, and the only way I could make you do that was to see that you were pushed by reflex. Protecting the young — that doesn't have to filter through the con-

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scious; that makes you *move;* we saw that already. So—"

"So now," said Hibsen, raging, "we've won a battle and lost a war. What's the use of all this, Brabant? We've got a ship, but we can't fly it. You said so yourself — you proved it to us!"

"No," corrected Brabant, "I proved it to the Gormen. Wait. Listen."

Outside, there was a muffled clattering. The Crescenzi children began to whimper; they hadn't had time to before.

Brabant nodded absently. "The Gormen are getting ready to break in. This is an important ship, you see. It's their biggest in this system, and the only one that's armed."

"You — want us to destroy it?" Hibsen guessed.

"I want to fly it up to *Explorer.*"

"Without computers? But—"

"But we have computers, Hibsen," said Brabant. "Three of them. You, and de Jouvenel, and Rae."

He had them, Brabant exulted wearily. A month of hatred could not be wiped out in a second, but he had managed a suspension of emotion. They were all waiting. They would give his plan a try.

"Come along," he said, nodding to the three of them, and climbed the rounded spikes that took them to the bare pilot's room.

The muffled outside clattering stopped and was replaced by a persistent, purposeful *rasp, rasp.* Time was flying. But there would be time; and either they would succeed or, as a bare minimum, there would be a good many dead Gormen around the base of a destroyed ship.

"Sit down, Hibsen," he ordered.

The pilot looked at him, licked his lips, sat in the webwork chair. The straps and spring metal fitted themselves easily around his lean body; they were planned for a Gorman, but they would have fitted a skeleton as easily, for they were designed to fit whatever they were given to hold.

"Rae, you and de Jouvenel lie down. Anywhere. These ships have plenty of power, according to Jaroff, so we won't have to pile on too much G at first — but it won't be comfortable."

HE stretched himself on the bare floor near Hibsen and glanced around. The remote *rasp, rasp* was louder, but that menace would be at an end in a second.

"Hibsen," said Brabant conversationally, "you know how to operate this ship. All right, take it off."

With a tranced expression, Hibsen put his fingers into the Gorman controls.

He glanced at Brabant for reassurance, sighed, licked his lips again, closed his eyes—

Gently, his fingers moved in the rings.

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Red roaring flame leaped out below them.

Brabant found himself letting go, slumping, his rigid self-control no longer needed. It was all up to Hibsen now. If the thing worked, fine. If not, they were all dead. There were no other alternatives.

The ship shook. It leaped a fraction of an inch and settled, leaped again, hesitated, and at last stood free of the soil of Aleph Four.

Faintly, over the roar of the power plant, Brabant could hear Hibsen sobbing. Brabant glanced at him. Hibsen's face was the face of a man in mortal terror; his mouth twisted and his eyes blinked with a rapid tic.

But he was flying the ship.

It did not crash. It hardly faltered. Every faint motion was translated instantly into a quick, gentle and sure manipulation of the rings. Hibsen's eyes, open now, were fixed absently on the attitude jet of mercury, but it was his body as much as his eyes that told him what he needed to know; the forces that might tug the ship off its center of gravity tugged also at the tiny otoliths in his ear and he felt a change of attitude as soon as it happened, before it mattered. There was no loss of control, not even for a fraction of a second. The ship gained all its ponderous power and began to climb.

(Down below, thirty Gormen lay dead and a score more dying. It no longer mattered — their ship was gone; whatever might happen, that ship had got away.)

Grinding heels of acceleration crushed Brabant and all of them.

Even so, Hibsen's control did not waver. The others sat or lay while the floor and the webwork chairs heaved against them, but Hibsen kept the ship secure — up — up and out, up and out —

In three minutes, they were clear of the atmosphere. The great primary burned at them. Stars flamed in a black sky. There were no more clouds and no more air. And Hibsen, shaking himself like a man coming out of a dream, cut the power by withdrawing his fingers from the rings.

"We — did it," he whispered, staring at his hands. "Brabant. *How?*"

BRABANT moved from the floor and floated free. All the weight was gone from him — not merely the hundred and seventy pounds of his flesh and bone, but the greater weight that had been on his mind. He was free! Almost, like Hibsen, he sang.

Instead, he said: "Take a look below, de Jouvenel. See how the others made out."

The little dark man, looking horribly confused, propelled himself to the rounded spikes and down. Hibsen and the girl were looking at Brabant and their eyes

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were large with questions, but just at this moment Brabant couldn't answer questions. He didn't trust his voice.

All the weeks of painfully demonstrating the simple truths of psychology before the impassive Gormen, and the carefully planned conditioning that underlay those weeks as a secret message lies under a printed page — they had paid off. What the subconscious mind could always do — act! without delay! — he had made them do then. The days in the Gorman building, the scant hours he had had for the finishing touches, yesterday, in the Gorman ship—these had been enough. They were free.

He tried to tell them.

"But," said Hibsen, "but . . ." And he paused. He said fretfully: "But you betrayed us!"

"No," said Brabant, "I only kept you out of trouble. You didn't have a chance with your plans of catching the Gormen off guard and I couldn't afford to let you fail. One failure was too many and—"

"But you could have told *me*, Howard," the girl objected, hurt.

Brabant looked at her. "I'm sorry," he said after a moment.

"Oh, no! You don't have to apologize! But — we wronged you. I more than anyone else, I suppose, because I should have known."

Brabant said: "I couldn't tell you. That building was bugged; there was no word that any of you said, ever, that they didn't hear. But even if they hadn't, how could I risk getting you overconfident? My plan wasn't that sure of working, believe me."

De Jouvenel floated up out of the hatch, asprawl, catching at a spike and missing. "They're all all right, Brabant," he said, upside down.

"Then let's get out of here! I want to get back to *Explorer II* right away — before anything goes wrong."

De Jouvenel said patiently: "But we don't have its coordinates."

"You do," said Brabant. "You're the navigator. You put it in orbit."

"But — good Lord, Brabant! I can't remember—"

"Trance state, please. Now."

The little man tensed slightly. No glassy look to his eyes, no melodramatic flopping to the floor — nor would there have been even if they had not been in free-fall.

DE Jouvenel frowned. He caught absently at a corner of Hibsen's webwork seat as he floated past and moored himself. He was thinking.

The question had been asked: What were the coordinates of *Explorer II's* present position? To answer it involved knowing its exact speed and distance from the primary at the time of entering

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free-fall, the perturbations of Aleph and its satellites, the smaller, more remote perturbations of every other astronomical body within a certain mass-over-distance parameter. It was not a question that de Jouvenel could answer. Certainly not.

But the mind that slept under the skin of de Jouvenel woke to answer for him, the mind that received all and forgot nothing, the sleeping subconscious mind that is in every human. That mind remembered every digit of every number it had conceived — it counted pulse-beats when it had to, measured the intervals between sunset and sunset, though its owner took no notice.

It was, in a word, a computer.

De Jouvenel writhed and strained, and — abruptly—spouted a string of course coordinates. It was an amazing experience for him. He found his own mouth, in his own voice, answering Brabant's question. It was the queerest of all sensations for him; it was like nothing that had ever happened to him before. The numbers meant *nothing* to him. He would have sworn, and believed it to be true, that he had forgotten every datum and that the numbers were random, wrong.

But something inside him had never forgotten, and the numbers were not wrong. With Hibsen's help, they became a course and gently, surely, the captured rocket swung into orbit after the mother ship.

Less than two hours later, they were decelerating gently, and the long swinging bolo that was *Explorer II's* tractor and trailer lay waiting in the emptiness before them.

Brabant clung to Rae, soft and silent next to him, and his thoughts were all triumph. The questions that had yet to be answered were beyond counting. What were the Gormen doing on Aleph Four? Was it rockets alone that carried them on interstellar flight? What were their objectives in attacking the human race? Was peace possible, or an armed truce?

But all those questions had an answer, somewhere, sometime, and by their bringing to Earth a Gorman ship, armed with Gorman arms, surely someone would be able to deduce the answers they needed. It was only a matter of going now. Give them a chance to build up speed, and no vessel, Gorman or other, could catch them, and they had that chance. The little Gorman craft on Aleph Four could do them no harm, and Bes was too far away.

RAE Wensley stirred contentedly in his arm, then straightened. "Howard, what are they doing?"

She was looking at *Explorer II.*

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Before their eyes, the long kinked tow line began to straighten; a thin violet haze was spraying back from the tractor.

"Why —" Brabant laughed. "They're trying to get away!"

They could see the periscopes on their side of the trailer, fixed rigidly on the Gorman rocket. Almost they could see Captain Serrell's anxious face as he watched this strange craft floating in on him.

Brabant said with a gentle grin: "Hibsen, better stick your ugly mug out in that port and wave to him. Put yourself in the captain's place — he waits and waits, and when somebody finally shows up, it's a Gorman ship. He's going to need some reassurance!"

— FREDERIK POHL

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

With readers' instructions in, and our overwhelmed thanks to the literally thousands who gave them to us, we have as clear a battle strategy as ever a magazine rode into the circulation war with.

Two-part book-length serials are wanted; they will be coming off the drawing boards before long, and into crash-priority production. Until they do, the sizable minority against them can enjoy the succession of complete issues — and we hope they won't desert when the majority wish is fulfilled!

Novellas and novelets — no change ordered.

Short stories — now that we know more are desired, because they can be read in a break at office or lab or factory or home, we'll sent out patrols and scouting parties to bring them in alive, very much alive.

Science department — more variety wanted, will do; more speculation, will do; readers' questions reinstated, will do if, and only if, you write in.

Book review department — only change clearly ordered by the majority is greater coverage; paperbacks, as you'll note in this issue, are now being briefly reviewed. We have another innovation in mind for the next issue that may make the "shopping list," as one reader put it and very many others later agreed, still more helpful. Let us know then if it is, please.

Editorials — will do, but lighter, heavier, "only when you have something to say," or "confined to doings about the magazine" — conflicting orders, as you can see, but we'll turn ourselves inside out trying to comply. How's the one in this issue? If you have anything to add or argue about, come on, chum, share it with us!

Letter department — at least half are willing to try it, but are waiting for the next guy to write in. Well, who'll be first?

Better cover stock — will do, but we had to use up the supply on hand.

Thanks for the enormous turnout. Write soon and often, will you?

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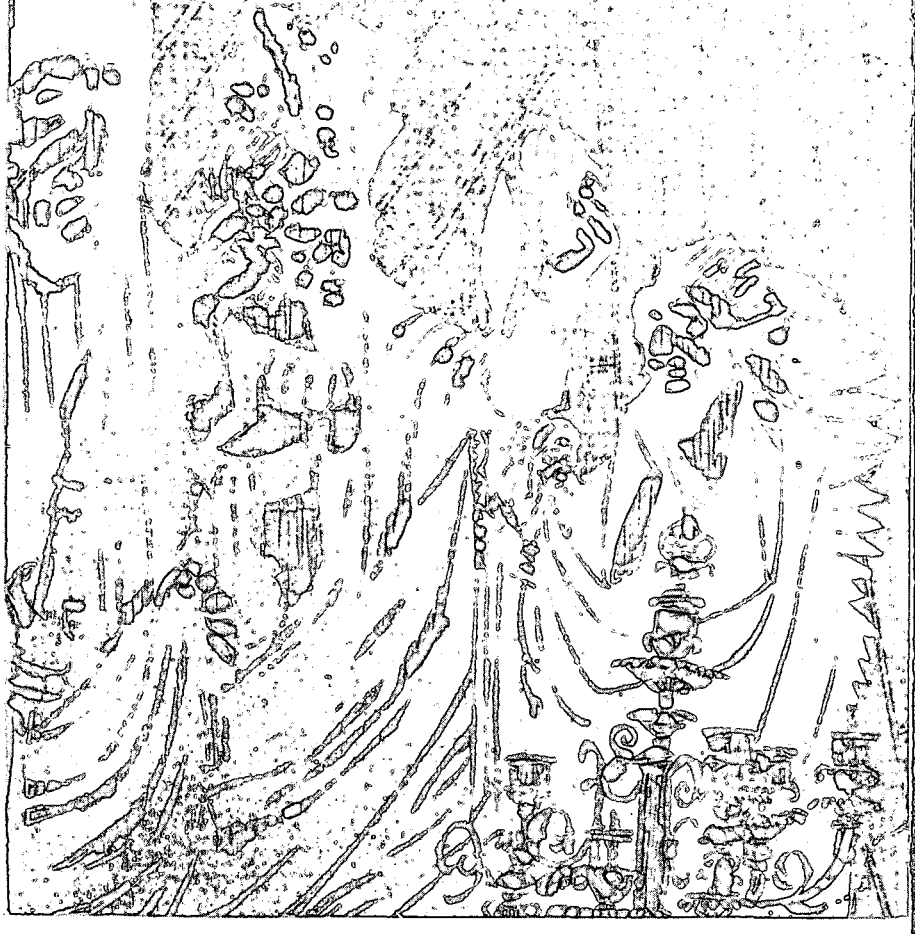
How could a counterfeit civilization be put on a paying basis? Simplicity itself — force it to give up wooden nickels and instead . . .

Take Wooden



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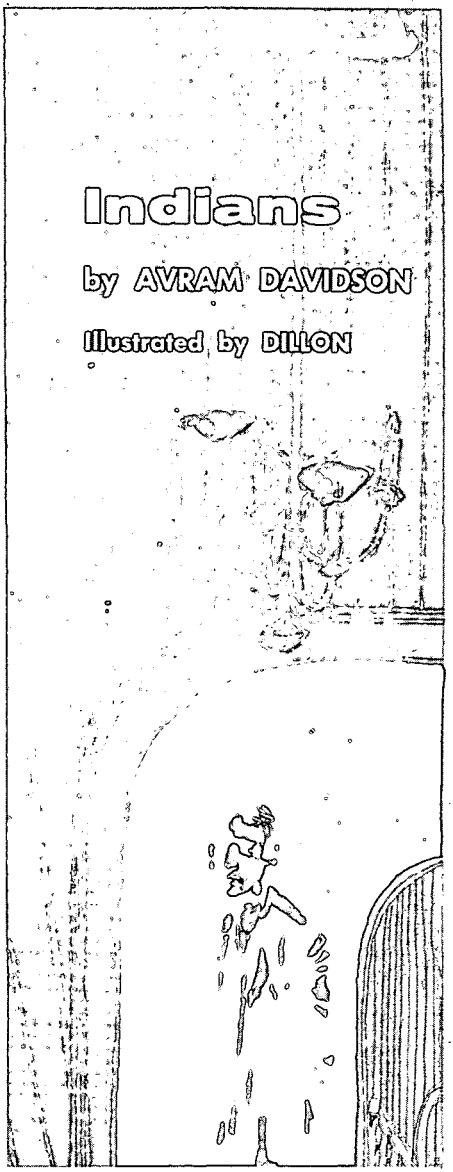

Indians

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Illustrated by DILLON

DOWN from the streets (morning air already gray and bitter with motor exhaust and industrial fumes), into the jampacked subway he passed. His clothes, though mildly incongruous in that unhappy throng, brought him no special measure of attention. Weary, wary, cynical, grim, displeasured indifference lying on each countenance like an oily film, the folk stared not so much at him as over and through him.

He fought to keep his feet, struggled to maintain his balance. This, merely the antechamber to everyday existence, was difficult enough. Add to it the need to be constantly on the lookout for the Wooden Indian Society and he felt he had reason to be tense and jumpy. "Benedict, a leading modern free-form sculptor in wood—" Ha!

Twice he had been aware that they had tailed him as far as Times Square. Twice he had lost them. A third time—

The man in the faintly funny-looking clothes (his name was Don Benedict, but some called him "Dusty") paused for a minute under one of the red-lettered wooden signs, took a quick look at the paper in his hand (more, it almost seemed, to reassure himself that it was still there than to scan the contents), did an about-face and started back the way he had come. By and by he came to a stairway

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which he ascended for five steps, then turned around and went down. At the bottom —

At the bottom of it all was Elwell, and Elwell was dead: not from the cough which had been tearing him apart for years, but dead of a slippery little patch of ice no bigger than a man's hand. Elwell, dying, with blood in the corners of his mouth, holding Don's hand in a grip which the younger man could feel the heat going out of.

"But it belongs to the WIS," Don had protested.

And Elwell: "No, Don, no — it belongs to me. I formed it. I proved it."

"They'll never allow—"

With a desperate, slow intensity, shaking his head, Elwell had explained. Reluctantly, Don agreed. It seemed to him that he was agreeing to no more than the first risk. But then, with Elwell dead, and the WIS turning against them both — first with coldness, then with clamor, then with a silent tenacity more disturbing than either — Don Benedict came to see that it was not only the beginning which was his, but that it was all his. Forevermore.

AT the bottom of the stairs, he saw the man out of the corner of his eye, eye intent upon feet, feet pacing out the pattern. He stopped for a moment, intending only to turn. And stayed stopped. The man (it was Anders) took hold of his arm as if to urge him on.

"I'm coming with you, Benedict." Eyes burning, voice iron-hard.

"I'm going alone."

"You've betrayed the trust, used what belongs to all of us, used it for yourself alone. The WIS—"

As always, so now, the Wooden Indian Society undoing themselves: Anders, trembling with fury, unawarely released his grip. Don placed the cushion of his palm under Ander's chin, thrust forward and upward with all his strength. And at once, swift — but not forgetting himself, not breaking into a run — he finished what he had to do. Anders staggered back, arms flailing, feet failing at purchase; then Don, turning his head at the last, saw him fall, the electric lights glaring on the white-tiled walls.

His foot jarred, as always, missing the familiar flooring by an inch. He adjusted his gait to the flagstone pave of the alley. It stretched before him and behind him for twenty feet in either direction. There was no one in sight.

About halfway along, there was a deep recess, a bricked-up door, and here Don hid until he was quite sure that Anders was not coming through. There was never any certainty that the WIS had not pieced it together, spying — somehow — pieced it together, bit by bit. There was always that tension,

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even here – though less, much less. After all, if they did get through, it would no longer be him that they were primarily after. It would be Demuth's. And Demuth's could look out for themselves.

Waiting, ears alert, he recalled the last meeting of the WIS he had dared attend. Mac Donald, eyes blazing deep in their sockets, had broken into Derwentwater's measured phrases, thrust a shaking finger into Don's face.

"Do you call yourself a Preservationist? Yes or no? Stand up and be counted!"

Staunchly, he had faced him, had answered. "I consider myself a philosophical Preservationist. I do not believe in violent—"

Face convulsed, fists clenched in the air, *"Traitor! Traitor!"* Mac Donald had screamed.

Not yielding, Don started to speak, got no further than Elwell's name, when Mac Donald – and Anders, Gumpert, De Giovanetti, almost all of them, in fact – had drowned him out with their outcry, their threats. *How much had Demuth's paid him? How much had he sold out for?*

Demuth's! Don mouthed the name scornfully. As if he would touch their tainted money. He had learned, the hard way, that Elwell was right all along, that the WIS were fanatics who would shrink from nothing. Well, he wasn't doing any shrinking, either.

DON Benedict came out of the niche – Anders wasn't going to get through this time, that was clear – and walked on down the alley. In less than a minute, he came out into a courtyard where heaps of chips and sawdust lay on one side and heaps of hay on the other. A man in dung-smeared boots came out of the building to the left with a bucket of milk in his hand. He paused, squinted, tugged his tobacco-stained beard and put down the bucket.

"Hey, Dusty! Glad to see you," he greeted the newcomer. "You yust get into town?"

"Ee-yup," said Don Dusty. "How you, Swan?"

Swan said he was fine, and inquired about things up in Sairacuse.

"Capital," said Dusty. "Hay's bringing a fine price—"

Swan groaned, spat into the sawdust. "Good for dem, maybe. Not for me. I tink you been at de bottle, hey, Dusty? You look yumpy, like always, ven you yust come in."

"Bottle? I get little enough out of any bottle I buy. My damned brother-in-law" (it was true – he had forgotten about Walter; it would be nice if he never had to remember) "drinks my liquor, smokes my cigars, wears my shirts, and spends my money."

Swan groaned sympathetically, picked up the bucket. "Vy don't you kick him de hell out?"

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Nice advice, would be a pleasure to take it. Of course, Mary wouldn't be able to stand it. Poor rabbity Mary.

"All I need is to get back to work. That'll fix me up." Don/Dusty waved, continued on his way across the yard and went into the doorway of the tall brick building to the right. Inside, it was cool and dark and smelled of wood and paint.

Dusty took a deep breath and began to smile.

He started up the stairs, ignoring the painted hand with outstretched finger and word *Office* on the first floor. By the time he reached the second floor, his smile was very broad. Softly, he began to sing "Aura Lee" and went in through the open door.

The big loft was dark; little light came in through the small and dirty windows, but at regular intervals a gas-jet flared. Dusty paused to greet his friends. Silently they stared down at him, peering from underneath the hands shading their eyes, stretching out their arms in wordless welcome, plumage blazing in a frenzy of colors.

"Hello, there, Tecumseh! How, Princess Redwing! Osceola, Pocahontas—"

A red-faced little man in a long striped apron trotted out into view, two tufts of snowy hair decorating his cheeks, a hat of folded newsprint on his head.

"Dusty, Dusty, I'm darned glad to see you!" he exclaimed.

"Hello, Charley Voles. How's everything at C. P. Hennaberry's?"

CHARLEY shook his head. "Good *and* bad," he said. "Good *and* bad. Oscar snagged his hand on a nail moving some plunder at home and it festered up something terrible. We was feared it was going to mortify at first, but I guess he's on the mend at last. Can't work, though, no-o-o-o, can't work. And Hennery was too numerous with the drink, fell off the wagon again and I think he must still be in the Bridewell, unless'n maybe his sentence is up today. Meanwhile, the work is piling high. Thunderation, yes—fly-figures, rosebuds, pompeys, *two* Turks under orders—"

"Two?" Dusty paused with his arms half out of his coat sleeves, whistled.

Charley nodded proudly. "Gent in Chicago opening up a big emporium, two Turks *and* two Sir Walters. Only thing is—" his ruddy little face clouded — "gent is clamoring for delivery, says if he don't get 'em soon he'll order from Detroit. And you know what *that* means, Dusty: Let trade get away and it never comes back. Why, the poor Major is pulling his whiskers out worrying. 'Course, with you back in town—"

Dusty, tying his apron, pursed

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his lips. "Well, now, Charley—now you know, I never did fancy my work much on the special figures. I want to help Major Hennaberry all I can, but—" He shook his head doubtfully and started to lay out his tools.

Charley Voles tut-tutted. "Oscar and Hennery was working on the Turks when they was took sick or drunk. *I* had the top three of a Sir Walter done, but I had to leave off to handle a couple of prior orders on sachems. Now if you'll take on the sachems, I can finish the specials. How's that strike you?"

Dusty said it struck him fine. He strode over to the hydraulic elevator shaft and gave two piercing whistles.

"Boy!" he shouted. "Boy! Benny?"

A treble from the office floor inquired if that was him, Mr. Dusty, and said it would be right up. A noise of gasping and stomping from below indicated that someone else would be right up, too.

"I want some breakfast, Benny," Dusty said, tossing him a coin. "Here's a quarter of a dollar. Get me the usual — eggs, pancakes, sausages, toast, coffee and crullers. Get some beer for Mr. Voles. And you can keep the change. *Hello,* Major Hennaberry!"

The elevator cage surged slowly into view. First came Major Hennaberry's bald spot, then his custard-colored eyes, magenta nose and cheeks, pepper-and-salt whiskers, and, gradually, the Major himself, breathing noisily. In his hand he held a booklet of some sort.

SLOWLY and sybillantly, the Major moved forward, shook Dusty's hand.

"Don't know what's come over the American mechanic nowadays," he said at last, asthmatically. "Can't seem to keep himself safe, sober, or in the city limits, and acts as if Hell has let out for noon. . . . Got some lovely white pine for you, my boy, fresh up from the spar yards. Don't waste a minute — soon's you get outside of your victuals, commence work. Draw on the cashier if you want anything in advance of wages: a dollar, two dollars, even a half-eagle.

"Never had so many orders nor so few men to execute them since starting in business," the Major wheezed on. "Even had Rat Nolan on picket duty for me, combing South Street and the Bowery — offered him three dollars apiece for any carvers he could find. Nothing, couldn't find a one. It's the catálog that's done the boom, my lad. The power of advertising. Here — read it whilst you eat; be pleased to have your opinion."

Hissing and panting, he made his way back to the elevator, jerked the rope twice, slowly sank from sight.

Dusty turned to the old artisan.

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"Charley," he said, slowly, as if he hadn't quite determined his words, "hear anything about Demuth's?"

Charley made a face. "What would you want to hear about that ugly, pushy outfit?"

Changing, somewhat, his point of inquiry, Dusty asked, "Well, now, have you ever thought about the significance of the wooden Indian in American history?"

The old man scratched the left fluff of whisker. "By crimus, that's a high-toned sentence," he said, rather dubiously. "Hmm. Well, all's I can tell you — history, hey? — the steam engine was the makings of the show-figure trade, tobacco shop or otherwise. Certainly. All us old-timers got our start down on South Street, carving figureheads for sailing craft. That was about the time old Hennaberry got his major's commission in the Mercantile Zouaves—you know, guarding New York City from the Mexicans. Yes, sir. But when steam come *in*, figureheads went *out*. Well, 'twasn't the end of the world."

And he described how he and his fellow-artists had put their talents at the disposal of the show-figure trade, up to then a rather haphazard commerce. "History, hey? Well, I have had the idea it's sort of odd that as the live Indian gets scarcer, the wooden ones gets numerouser. But how come you to ask, Dusty?"

Carefully choosing his words, Dusty asked Charley to imagine a time in the far-off future when wooden Indians — show figures of any sort — were no longer being carved.

Had, in fact, suffered for so long a universal neglect that they had become quite rare. That gradually interest in the sachems revived, that men began to collect them as if they had been ancient marble statues, began to study all that could be learned about them.

That some of these collectors, calling themselves the Wooden Indian Society, had been consumed with grief at the thought of the debacle which overtook the figures they had grown to love. Had claimed to see in the decline and death of this native art a dividing line in American history.

"IT was like, Charley, it was like this was the end of the old times altogether," Don went on, "the end of the Good Old Days, the final defeat of native crafts and native integrity by the new, evil forces of industrialism. And they thought about this and it turned them bitter and they began to brood. Until finally they began to plan how they could undo what had been done. They believed that if they could travel from their time to — to our time, like traveling from here to, say, Brooklyn—"

How much of this could Charley grasp? Perhaps better not to have tried.

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Don/Dusty spoke more rapidly. "That if they could reach this time period, they could preserve the wooden Indian from destruction. And then the great change for the worse would never occur. The old days and the old ways would remain unchanged, or at least change slowly."

"You mean they got this idea that if they could change what happened to the wooden Indians, they could maybe change the course of American history?"

Dusty nodded.

Charley laughed. "Well, they were really crazy — I mean they would be, if there was to be such people, wouldn't they? Because there ain't no way—"

Dusty blinked. Then his face cleared. "No, of course there isn't. It was just a moody dark thought . . . Ah, here comes Ben with my breakfast."

Charley lifted his beer off the laden tray, gestured his thanks, drank, put down the glass with a loud "Hah" of satisfaction. Then a sudden thought creased his face. "Now leave me ask you this, Dusty. Just what could ever happen to destroy such a well-established and necessary business as the show-figure business? Hmm?"

Dusty said that these people from the Wooden Indian Society, in this sort of dark thought he'd had, had looked into matters real thoroughly. And they came to believe very deeply, very strongly, that the thing which killed the wooden Indian, and in so doing had changed American history so terribly for the worst, had been the invention and marketing of an Indian made of cast-iron or zinc. An Indian which would have no life, no soul, no heart, no grace — but which would never wear out or need to be replaced.

And so it would sell — sell well enough to destroy the carvers' craft — but would destroy the people's love for the newer show figures at the same time.

Charley looked shocked. "Why, that'd be a terrible thing, Dusty — a thing which it'd cut a man to the heart! Cast-iron! Zinc! But I tell you what — if there ever was to be an outfit which'd do a thing like that, there'd be only one outfit that would. Demuth's. That's who. Ain't I right?"

Dusty lowered his head. In a low, choked voice, he said, "You're right."

DUSTY propped the catalog against a short piece of pine, read as he ate.

"I don't know what it is," he said to old Charley, "but I have such an appetite here. I never eat breakfast at all when I'm—" He stopped, put a piece of sausage in his mouth, intently began to read.

We would respectfully solicit

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from the Public generally an inspection of our Large and Varied Assortment of WOODEN SHOW FIGURES *which we are constantly manufacturing for all classes of business, such as* SEGAR STORES, WINES & LIQUORS, SHIP CHANDLERS, INSTRUMENT MAKERS, DRUGGISTS, YANKEE NOTIONS, UMBRELLA, CLOTHING, CHINA TEA STORES, GUNSMITHS, BUTCHERS, &C, &C. *Our Figures are both carved and painted in a manner which cannot be excelled, are durable and designed and executed in a highly artistic manner, and are furnished at non-competitive low prices. We are constantly receiving orders for statues and emblematic signs, and can furnish same of any required design with promptness.*

The sausage was fresh and savory; so was the coffee. Dusty chewed and swallowed with relish, slowly turned the pages of the catalog.

OUR NUMBER 23. Fly-figure, male 5 ft. high, bundle of 20 in outstretched hand (r.), usual colors. A nice staple type Show Figure no moderate-sized bus. need feel ashamed to display. At rival establishments, UP TO $75. *C. P. Hennaberry's Price: $50 even (with war-bonnet, $55).*

Note: Absolutely impos. to cite trade-in values *via* mails, as this depends on age, size, condition of fig., also state of market @ time.

OUR NUMBER 24. Same as above, with musket instead of tomahawk.

OUR NUMBER 36. Turk, male 6 ft. high, for shops which sell the fragrant Ottoman weed, polychrome Turk holding long [illegible] leaf betw. both hands, choice of any two colors on turban. A C. P. HENNABERRY SPECIAL: $165. (with beard & long pipe, $5 extra).

THEY went upstairs after Dusty had finished his breakfast, pausing on the third (or second-hand figures) floor, to greet Otto and Larry.

Young Larry was still considered a learner and was not yet allowed to go beyond replacing arms, hands, noses, and other extra parts.

Otto, to be sure, was a master carver, but Otto had several strikes against him. In his youth, in his native Tyrol, Otto had studied sacred iconography; in his maturity, in America, Otto had studied drinking. As a result, when he was mellow, unless he was carefully supervised, his Indians had a certain saintly quality to them, which made purchasers feel somehow guilty. And when, on the other

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hand, Otto was sobering up, a definite measure of apocalyptic horror invariably appeared in his sachems which frightened buyers away.

As a result, Otto was kept at doing extras — bundles of cigars, boxes of cigars, bundles of tobacco leaf, coils of tobacco leaf, twists of the same, knives, tomahawks, all to be held in the figures' hands — and at equally safe tasks like stripping off old paint, sanding, repainting, finishing.

He nodded sadly, eyes bloodshot, to Dusty and Charley, as he applied ochre and vermillion to a war bonnet. "Ho, Chesus," he groaned softly.

Up in the woodloft, they made an inspection of the spars. "Now you needn't pick the ones I started, of course," Charley said. "Take fresh ones, if you like. 'Course, all's I did was I drawn the outlines and just kind of chiseled 'em in. And put the holes in on top for the bolts."

Dusty stood back and squinted. "Oh, I guess they'll be all right, Charley," he said. "Well, let's get 'em downstairs."

This done, Charley went back to work on the Sir Walter, carefully chiseling *Virginia Tobacco* in bas-relief on the cloak.

Dusty took up his axe and blocked out approximate spaces for the head, the body down to the waist, roughly indicated the division of the legs and feet. Then he inserted the iron bolt into the five-inch hole prepared for it, and tilted back the spar so that the projecting part of the bolt rested on a support. When he had finished head and trunk, he would elevate the lower part of the figure in the same way.

Finally, finished with the blocking out, he picked up mallet and chisel.

"I now strike a blow for liberty," he said.

Smiling happily, he began to chip away. The song he sang was "Aura Lee."

DON/Dusty Benedict let himself into his studio quietly — but not quietly enough. The sharp sound of a chair grating on the floor told him that his brother-in-law was upstairs. In another second, Walter told him so himself in an accent more richly Southern, probably, than when he had come North as a young boy.

"We're upstairs, Don."

"Thank you for the information," Don muttered.

"We're *upstairs*, Don."

"Yes, Walter. All right. I'm coming."

Walter welcomed him with a snort. "Why the hell do you always wear those damn cotton-pickin' clothes when you go away? Not that it matters. I only wish *I* could just take up and go whenever the spirit moves me. Where was it you went this time?"

"Syracuse," Don mumbled.

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"Syracuse. America's new vacation land." Walter laughed, not pleasantly. "Don, you really expect me to believe you? Syracuse! Why not just say to me, frankly, 'I've got a woman'? That's all. I wouldn't say another word." He poured himself several drams of Don's Scotch.

Not much you wouldn't, Don thought. Aloud, "How are you, Mary?" His sister said that she was just fine, sighed, broke off the sigh almost at once, at her husband's sour look.

Walter said, "Roger Towns was up. Another sale for you, another commission for me. Believe me, I earned it — gave him a big talk on how the Museum of Modern Art was after your latest. So he asked me to use my influence. He'll be back — he'll take it. This rate, the Modern Art *will* be after you before long."

Don privately thought this unlikely, though anything was possible in this world of no values. He wasn't a "modern, free-form" artist, or, for that matter, any kind of artist at all. He was a craftsman — in a world which had no need for craftsmen.

"But *only*—" another one of the many qualities which made Walter highly easy to get along without: Walter was a finger-jabber— "but *only* if you finish the damned thing. About time, isn't it? I mean vacations are fine, but the bills . . ."

Don said, "Well, my affairs are in good hands — namely, yours."

Walter reared back. "If that's meant as a dig—! Listen, I can get something else to do any time I want. In fact, I'm looking into something else *now* that's damned promising. Firm sells Canadian stocks. Went down to see them yesterday. 'You're just the kind of man we're interested in, Mr. Swift,' they told me. 'With your vast experience and your knowledge of human nature. . . .'"

WALT scanned his brother-in-law's face, defying him to show signs of the complete disbelief he must have known Don felt. Don had long since stopped pretending to respond to these lies. He only ignored them — only put up with Walt at all — for his sister's sake. It was for her and the kids only that he ever came back.

"I'd like a drink," Don said, when Walt paused.

Dinner was as dinner always was. Walt talked almost constantly, mostly about Walt. Don found his mind wandering again to the Wooden Indian Society. Derwentwater, ending every speech with *"Delendo est Demuth's!"* Gumpert and his eternal "Just one stick of dynamite, Don, just one!" De Giovanetti growling, "Give us the Equation and we'll do it ourselves!"

Fools! They'd have to learn every name of those who had the

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hideous metal Indian in mind, conduct a massacre in Canal Street. Impossible. Absurd.

No, Elwell had been right. Not knowing just how the Preservationist work was to be done, he had nonetheless toiled for years to perfect a means to do it. Only when his work was done did he learn the full measure of WIS intransigence. And, after learning, had turned to Don.

"Take up the torch," he pleaded. "Make each sachem such a labor of love that posterity cannot help but preserve it."

And Don had tried. The craft had been in him and struggling to get out all the time, and he'd never realized it!

Slowly the sound of Walter's voice grew more impossible to ignore.

". . : and you'll need a new car, too. I can't drive that heap much longer. It's two years *old,* damn it!"

"I'd like a drink," Don said.

By the time Edgar Feld arrived, unexpectedly, Don had had quite a few drinks.

"I took the liberty not only of calling unheralded, but of bringing a friend, Mr. White," the art dealer said. He was a well-kept little man. Mr. White was thin and mild.

"Any friend of Edgar's is someone to be wary of," Don said. "Getchu a drink?"

Walt said he was sure they'd like to see the studio. There was plenty of time for drinks.

"Time?" Don muttered. "Whaddayu know about time?"

"Just step this way," Walt said loudly, giving his brother-in-law a deadly look. "We think, we rather think," he said, taking the wraps off the huge piece, "of calling this the Gemini—"

Don said genially that they had to call it *something* and that Gemini (he supposed) sounded better than Diseased Kidney.

Mr. White laughed.

EDGAR Feld echoed the laugh, though not very heartily. "Mr. Benedict has the most modest, most deprecatory attitude toward his work of any modern artist — working in wood or in any other medium."

Mr. White said that was very commendable. He asked Don if he'd like a cigar.

"I would, indeed!" the modest artist assented. "Between cigarette smoke, gasoline and diesel fumes, the air is getting unfit to breathe nowadays. . . . So Edgar is conning you into modern art, hey, Whitey?"

"Ho, ho!" Edgar Feld chuckled hollowly.

"Nothing better than a good cigar." Don puffed his contentment.

White said, with diffidence, that he was only just beginning to learn about modern art. "I used to collect Americana," he explained.

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Edgar Feld declared that Mr. White had formerly had a collection of wooden Indians. His tone indicated that, while this was not to be taken seriously, open mockery was uncalled for.

Don set down the glass he had brought along with him. No, White was hardly WIS material. He was safe. "Did you really? Any of Tom Millards, by any chance? Tom carved some of the sweetest fly-figures ever made."

Mr. White's face lit up. "Are you a wooden Indian buff, too?" he cried. "Why, yes, as a matter of fact, I had two of Millard's fly-figures, and one of his pompeys—"

Walt guffawed. "What are fly-figures and pompeys?"

"A fly-figure is a sachem with an outstretched arm," Don said. "A pompey is a black boy."

"A rosebud," Mr. White happily took up the theme, "is a squaw figure. A scout is one who's shading his eyes with one hand. Tom Millard, oh, yes! And I had some by John Cromwell, Nick Collins, Thomas V. Brooks, and Tom White — my namesake. Listen! Maybe you can tell me. Was Leopold Schwager a manufacturer or an artist?"

Don Benedict laughed scornfully. "Leopold Schwager was a junk-dealer! Bought old figures for five, ten dollars, puttied and painted 'em, sold 'em for twenty-five. Cobb!" he exclaimed suddenly. "You have any Cobbs, Mr. White?"

"Cobb of Canal Street? No, I always wanted one, but—"

Edgar Feld looked at Walter Swift, cleared his throat. "Now, Don—"

"Cobb of Canal Street," Don said loudly, "never used a mallet. No, sir. Drove the chisel with the palm of his hand. And then there was Charley Voles—"

Feld raised his voice above Don's. "Yes, we must talk about this fascinating though obsolete art sometime. Don't you want to step a little closer to the Gemini, Mr. White?"

"Yes, White, damn it, buy the damned Gemini so they'll quit bothering us and we can get back to *real* art," said Don.

And forget about Walter, Demuth's and the WIS, he said to himself.

NEXT morning, he tried to remember what had happened after that. White *had* taken the shapeless mass of wood Walt called Gemini. (What would he tell Roger Down, the private collector? Some good, whopping lie, depend on it.) He was sure he remembered White with his checkbook out. And then? A confused picture of White examining the polished surface, pointing at something—

Don Benedict badly wanted a cup of coffee. His room was just

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off the studio, and once there had been a hot-plate there, but Walt had ordered it removed on the grounds of danger. So now Don had to go up to Walt's apartment when he wanted a cup of coffee. That was how Walt liked everything to be: little brother coming to big brother. Well, there was no help for it. Don went upstairs, anticipating cold looks, curt remarks, at every step.

However, Walt was sweetness itself this morning. The coffee was ready; Walt had poured it even before Don entered the kitchen. After he finished his cup (made from unboiled water, powdered coffee, ice-cold milk) Walt urged another on him. Rather than speak, he took it.

Don knew, by the falsely jovial note of Walter's voice, that Something Was Up. He gulped the tepid slop and rose. "Thanks. See you later, Walter—"

But Walter reached out his hand and took him by the arm. "Let's talk about the Lost Dutchman Mine. ("The *what?*") The Spanish Treasure. ("I don't—") Spelled E-l-w-e-l-l," said Walter, with an air at once sly and triumphant.

Don sat down heavily.

"Don't know what I mean by those figures of speech? Odd. You did last night. Matter of fact, they were yours," said Walter, mouth pursed with mean amusement. He would refresh Don's memory. Last night, Mr. White had asked Don how he had come to have so much contemporary knowledge about the making of wooden Indians. Don had laughed. "An old prospector I befriended left me the map to the Lost Dutchman Mine," he had said, waving his glass. "To the Spanish Treasure."

When Mr. White, puzzed, asked what he meant, Don had said, "It's easy. You just walk around the horses." Now what, just exactly, had Don meant by that?

"I must have been drunk, Walter."

"Oh, yes, you were drunk, all right. But *in vino veritas* . . . Now I've been thinking it out very carefully, Don. It seems to me that 'the old desert rat' you spoke of must have been that fellow Elwell, who slipped on the ice two winters ago. The one you got to the hospital and visited regularly till he died. Am I right, Don? Am I?"

DON nodded miserably. "Damn liquor," he added.

"*Now* we're making progress," said Walt. "*Okay*. Now about this map to the mine. I know he left you that damn notebook. I know that. But I looked it over very carefully and it was just a lot of figures scribbled — equations, or what ever th' hell you call 'em. But it had something else in it, didn't it? Something you took out. We'll get to just what by and by. So —

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and it was right after that that you started going on these vacations of yours. Made me curious. Those funny clothes you wore."

Stiff and tight, Don sat in the bright, neat kitchen and watched the waters rise. There was nothing for him here and now, except for Mary and the children, and his love for them had been no more selfish than theirs for him. He had been glad when Walt first appeared, happy when they married, unhappy when Walt's real nature appeared, very pleased when the chance occurred to offer "a position" to his brother-in-law. The misgivings felt when a few people actually offered to buy the shapeless wooden things he had created almost aimlessly (he knowing that he was not a sculptor but a craftsman) vanished when he saw it was the perfect set-up for keeping Mary and the kids supported.

Of course, after a while Don had been able to arrange the majority of the "sales." The waste of time involved in hacking out the wooden horrors which "private collectors" bought was deplorable. The whole system was dreadfully clumsy, but its sole purpose — to create a world in which Walter would be satisfied and Mary happy — was being fulfilled, at any rate.

Or had been.

What would happen now, with Walter on the verge of finding out everything?

"And Syracuse — what a cotton-pickin' alibi! I figured you had a woman hid away for sure, wasting your time when you should have been working, so — well, I wanted to find out who she was, where she lived. That's why I always went through your pockets when you came back from these 'vacations'—"

"Walter, you didn't!"

BUT of course he knew damned well that Walter did. Had known for some time that Walter was doing it. Had acted accordingly. Instead of hiding the evidence, he had deliberately planted it, and in such a way that it couldn't possibly fail to add up to exactly one conclusion.

"What a lot of junk!" Walter jeered. "Like somebody swept the floor of an antique shop and dumped it all in your pocket. Ticket stubs with funny old printing, clippings from newspapers of years back — and all like that. *However* —" he jabbed a thick, triumphant finger at Don — "money is money, no matter how old it is. Right? *Damned* right! Old dollar bills, old gold pieces. Time after time. You weren't very cautious, old buddy. So now—just what *is* this 'Spanish Treasure' that you've been tapping? Let's have the details, son, or else I'll be mighty unhappy. And when I'm unhappy, Mary is, too..."

That was very true, Don had realized for some time now. And if

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Mary couldn't protect herself, how could the youngsters escape?

"I'm tired of scraping along on ten per cent, you see, Don. I got that great old American ambition: I want to be in business for myself. And you are going to provide the capital. So — again, and for the last time — let's have the details."

Was this the time to tell him? And, hard upon the thought, the answer came: Yes, the time was now, time to tell the truth. At once his heart felt light, joyous; the heavy weight (long so terribly, constantly familiar) was removed from him.

"Mr. Elwell — the old gentleman who slipped on the ice; you were right about that, Walter—" Walter's face slipped into its familiar, smug smile. "Mr. Elwell was a math teacher at the high school down the block. Imagine it — a genius like him, pounding algebra into the heads of sullen children! But he didn't let it get him down, because that was just his living. What he mainly lived for were his space-time theorems. 'Elwell's Equations,' we called them—"

Walter snorted. "Don't tell me the old gimp was a time traveler and left you his time machine?"

"It wasn't a machine. It was only a—well, I guess it *was* a sort of map, after all. He tried to explain his theories to me, but I just couldn't understand them. It was kind of like chess problems — I never could understand *them*, either. So when we arranged that I was going to visit 1880, he wrote it all down for me. It's like a pattern. You go back and forth and up and down and after a while—"

"After a while you're in 1880?"

"That's right."

Walter's face had settled in odd lines. "I thought you were going to try not telling me what I'd figured out for myself," he said in the cutting exaggeration of his normally exaggerated Southern drawl. This was the first time he had used it on Don, though Don had heard it used often enough on Mary and the kids. "The map, and all those clues you were stupid enough to leave in your pockets, and the stupidest of all—carving your own squiggle signature into all those dozens of old wooden Indians. Think I can't add?"

"But that was Canal Street, 1880, and this is now," said Don in a carefully dismal-sounding voice. "I thought it was safe."

Walter looked at him. Walter — who had never earned an ethical dollar in his life, and had scarcely bothered to make a pretense of supporting his wife since Don's work had started to sell — asked, "All right, why 1880 — and why wooden Indians?"

DON explained to him how he felt at ease there, how the air was fresher, the food tastier, how

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the Russians were a menace only to other Russians, how — and the sachems! What real, sincere pleasure and pride he got out of carving them.

They were *used!* Not like the silly modern stuff he turned out now, stuff whose value rested only on the fact that self-seekers like Edgar Feld were able to con critics and public into believing it was valuable.

Walt scarcely heard him. "But how much money can you make carving wooden Indians?"

"Not very much in modern terms. But you see, Walt — I invest."

And that was the bait in the trap he'd set and Walt rose to it and struck. "The market! Damn it to hell, of *course!*" The prospect of the (for once in his whole shoddy career) Absolutely Sure Thing, the Plunge which was certain to be a Killing, of moving where he could know without doubt what the next move would be, almost deprived Walter of breath.

"A tycoon," he gasped. "You could have been a tycoon and all you could think of was—"

Don said that he didn't want to be a tycoon. He just wanted to carve wooden—

"Why, I could make us better than tycoons! Kings! Emperors! One airplane—" He subsided after Don convinced him that Elwell's Equation could transport only the individual and what he had on or was carrying. "Lugers," he muttered. "Tommy-guns. If I'm a millionaire, I'll need bodyguards. Gould, Fisk, Morgan — they better watch out, that's all."

He slowly refocused on Don. "And *I'll* carry the map," he said.

HE held out his hand. Slowly, as if with infinite misgivings, Don handed over to him the paper with Elwell's 1880 Equation.

Walter looked at it, lips moving, brows twisting, and Don recalled his own mystification when the old man had showed it to him.

"... *where* x *is one pace and* y *is five-sixth of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle of which both arms are* x *in length ...*"

"Well," said Walter, "now let's get down to business." He rose, went off toward the living room, returned in a minute. Following him was a man with the tense, set face of a fanatic. He looked at Don with burning eyes.

"Anders!" cried Don.

"Where is the Equation?" Anders demanded.

"Oh, *I* got that," Walter said.

He took it out, showed a glimpse, thrust it in his pocket. He stepped back, put a chair between him and the WIS man.

"Not so fast," he said. "I got it and I'm keeping it. At least for now. So let's talk business. Where's the cash?"

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AS Anders, breathing heavily, brought out the roll of bills, "Oh, Walter, what have you done?" Don moaned. "Don't throw me in the bramble-bush, Brer Wolf!"

"Here is the first part of it," said Anders, ignoring his former WIS associate. "For this you agree to return to Canal Street, 1880, and destroy — by whatever means are available — the infamous firm of Demuth's. In the unlikely case of their continuing in the business after the destruction—"

"They won't. Best goon job money can buy; leave it to me."

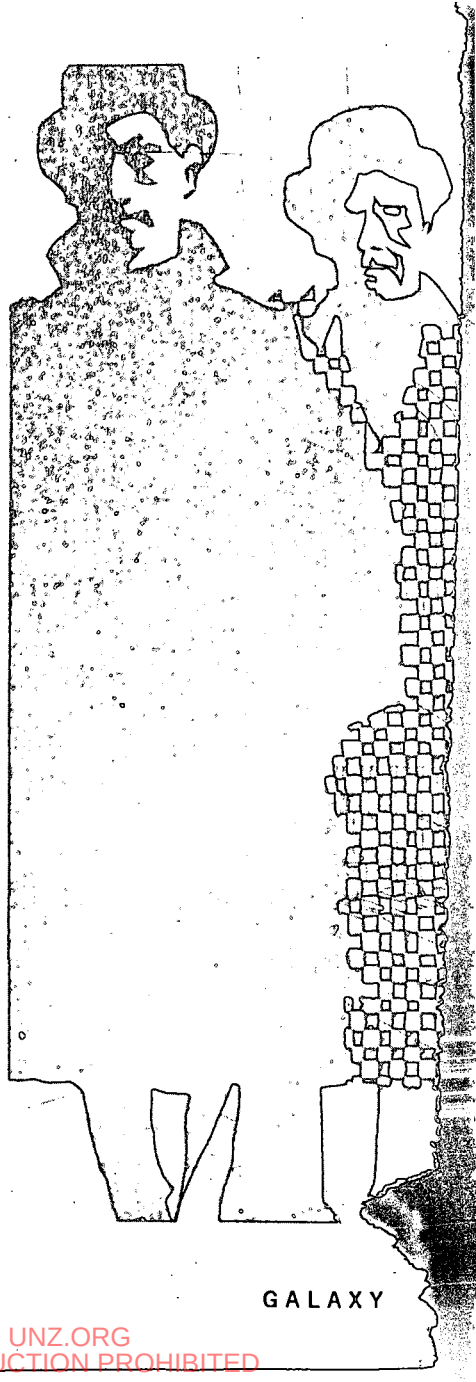
Anders hesitated.

Walter promptly said, "No, you can't come along. Don't ask again. Just him and me. I'll need him for bird-dogging. I'll get in touch when we come back. As agreed, I bring back copies of the New York papers showing that Demuth's was blown up or burned down. On your way."

With one single hate-filled glance, not unmixed with triumph, at Don, Anders withdrew. The door closed. Walter laughed.

"You aren't—" Don began.

"Not a chance. Think I'm crazy? Let him and his crackpot buddies whistle for their money. No doubt you are wondering how I put two and two in a vertical column and added, hey, Donny boy? Well, once I figured out that the 'Prospector' was Elwell, and saw the WIS membership card in your pocket, I re-



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membered that he and you used to go to those WIS meetings together, and I got in touch with them. They practically told me the whole story, but I wanted confirmation from you. All right, on your feet. We've got a pea patch to tear up."

While Walt was shaving, Don and Mary had a few minutes together.

"Why don't you just go, Don?" she begged. "I mean for good — away where he can't find you — and stay there. Never mind about me or the children. We'll make out."

"But wouldn't he take it out on you and them?"

"I said don't worry about us and I mean it. He's not all bad, you know. Oh, he might be, for a while, but that's just because he never really adjusted to living up North. Maybe if we went back to his home town—he always talks about it—I mean he'd be different there—"

He listened unhappily to her losing her way between wanting him out of her misery and hoping that the unchangeable might change.

"Mary," he broke in, "you don't have to worry any more. I'm taking Walt along and setting him up — really setting him up. And listen—" he wrote a name and address on the back of her shopping list— "go see this man. I've been investing money with his firm and there's plenty to take care of you and the kids — even if things go wrong with Walt and me. This man will handle all your expenses."

She nodded, not speaking. They smiled, squeezed hands. There was no need for embrace or kiss-the-children.

Whistling "Dixie," Walter returned. "Let's go," he said.

"Good-by, Don," said Mary.

"Good-by, Mary," said Don.

THAT afternoon, Don Benedict and Walter Swift, after visits to a theatrical costumer and a numismatist, entered the Canal Street subway station. Those who have had commerce with that crossroads of lower Manhattan know how vast, how labyrinthine, it is. Only a few glances, less than idly curious, were given them as they paced through the late Mr. Elwell's mathematical map. No one was present when they passed beneath a red-lettered sign reading "Canarsie Line" and vanished away.

As soon as he felt the flagstones beneath his feet, Walter whirled around and looked back. Instead of the white-tiled corridor, he saw a wet stone wall. For a moment, he swore feebly. Then he laughed.

"A pocketful of long green and another of gold eagles!" he exclaimed. "What shall we try for first? Erie or New York Central Common? No — first I want to see this place where you work. Oh, y[illegible] I *do*. Obstinacy will get you nowhere. Lead on."

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Wishing eventually to introduce Walt into Hennaberry's, Don had first taken him out to Canal Street. Leopold Schwager's second-hand establishment was opposite, the sidewalk lined with superannuated sachems. Other establishments of the show-figure trade were within stonethrow, their signs, flags and figures making a brave display. Horsecars, cabs, drays, private carriages went clattering by.

Walter watched the passing scene with relish, leering at the women in what he evidently thought was the best 1880 masher's manner. Then he wrinkled his nose.

"Damn it all," he said, "I hadn't realized that the Hayes Administration smelled so powerfully of the horse. But I suppose *you* like it?. Yes," he sneered, "you would. Well, enjoy it while you can. As soon as I manage to dig up some old plans, I propose to patent the internal combustion engine."

Don felt his skin go cold.

"John D. Rockefeller ought to be very, ver-ry interested," Walt said exultantly. "Why, five years from now, you won't know it's the same street . . . What're you pointing at?"

Don gestured to a scout-figure in full plumage outside a store whose awning was painted with the words, *"August Schwartz Segar Mfger Also Snuff, Plug, Cut Plug and Twist."*

"One of mine," he said, pride mixed with growing resolve.

Walter grunted. "You won't have any time for that sort of thing any more; I'll need you myself. Besides — yes, why not? Introduce cigarette machinery. Start a great big advertising campaign, put a weed in the mouth of every American over the age of sixteen."

A DRUNKEN sailor lurched down the street singing "Sweet Ida Jane from Portland, Maine." Automatically, Don stepped aside to let him pass.

"But if you do that," he said, no longer doubting that Walter would if he could, "then there won't be any more — nobody will need — I mean my work—"

Walter said irritably, "I told you, you won't have the time to be piddling around with a mallet and chisel. And now let's see your wooden-Injun mine."

Acting as if he felt that nothing mattered any more, Don turned and led the way toward the brick building where C. E. Hennaberry, Show Figures And Emblematic Signs, did business. Ben the boy paused in his never-ending work of dusting the stock models to give a word and a wave in greeting. He stared at Walt.

In the back was the office, old Van Wart the clerk-cashier and old Considine the clerk-bookkeeper, on their high stools, bending over their

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books as usual. On the wall was a dirty photograph in a black-draped frame, with the legend "Hon. Wm. Marcy Tweed, Grand Sachem of the Columbian Order of St. Tammany" and underneath the portrait was the Major himself.

"So this is the place!" Walter declared, exaggerated Southern accent rolling richly. Major Hennaberry's friend, Col. Cox, sitting on the edge of the desk cutting himself a slice of twist, jumped as if stung by a minié-ball. His rather greasy sealskin cap slid over one eye.

"Get all kinds of people in here, don't you, Cephas?" he growled. "All's I got to say is: I was at Fredericksburg, I was at Shilo, and all's I got to say is: the only good Rebel is a dead Rebel!"

The Major, as Don well knew, hated Rebels himself, with a fervor possible only to a Tammany Democrat whose profitable speculations in cotton futures had been interrupted for four long, lean years. Don also knew that the Major had a short way of dealing with partisans of the Lost Cause, or with anyone else who had cost or threatened to cost him money — if he could just be brought to the point.

The Major looked up now, his eye lighting coldly on Walter, who gazed around the not overly clean room with a curious stare. "Yes, sir, might I serve you, sir? Nice fly-figure, maybe? Can supply you with a Highlander holding simulated snuff-mill at a tear-down price; no extra charge for tam-o-shanter. Oh, Dusty. Glad to see you—"

"Dusty" mumbled an introduction. How quickly things had changed—though not in any way for the better — and how paradoxically: because he had refused the WIS demand to change the past by violence so that modernism would be held off indefinitely, he was now condemned to see modernism arrive almost at once. Unless, of course . . .

"BROTHER-IN-LAW, eh?" said Major Hennaberry, beginning to wheeze. "Dusty's done some speaking about you. Mmph." He turned abruptly to Don/Dusty. "What's all this, my boy, that Charley Voles was telling me — Demuth's coming up with some devilish scheme to introduce cast-iron show figures?" Dusty started, a movement noted by the keen though bloodshot eyes of his sometime employer. "Then it *is* true? Terrible thing, unconscionable. Gave me the liver complaint afresh, directly I heard of it. Been on medicated wine ever since."

Walt turned angrily on his brother-in-law. "Who told you to open your damn cotton-pickin' mouth?"

The Major's purplish lips parted, moved in something doubtless intended for a smile.

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"Now, gents," he said, "let's not quarrel. What must be must be, eh?"

"*Now* you're talking," said Walt, and evidently not realizing that he and Hennaberry had quite separate things in mind, he added: "Things will be different, but you'll get used to them."

Watching the Major start to wheeze in an unreasoning attack of rage, Dusty knew catalytic action was needed. "How about a drink, Major?" he suggested. "A Rat Nolan special?"

Unpurpling quickly, now merely nodding and hissing, the Major called for Ben. He took a coin out of his change purse and said: "Run over to Cooney's barrelhouse and bring back some glasses and a pitcher of rum cocktail. And ask Cooney does he know where Nolan is. I got some business with him."

The boy left on the lope, and there was a short, tight silence. Then Col. Cox spoke, an anticipatory trickle already turning the corners of his mouth a wet brown. "I was at Island Number Ten, and I was at Kenisaw Mountain, and what I say is: the only good Rebel is a dead Rebel."

Walt grinned and said nothing until Ben came back with the drinks.

"Well, Scotch on the rocks it isn't," he said then, taking a brief sip, "but it's not bad."

He gave a brief indifferent glance at the shifty little man with Burnside whiskers who had come back with Ben, carrying the glasses.

"To science and invention!" cried Walt. "To progress!" He drained half his glass. His face turned green, then white. He started to slide sidewise and was caught by the little man in Burnsides.

"Easy does it, cully," said Mr. Rat Nolan, for it was he. "Dear, dear! I hope it's not a touch of this cholera morbus what's been so prevalent. Expect we'd better get him to a doctor, don't you, gents?"

Major Hennaberry said that there was not a doubt about it. He walked painfully over to the elevator shaft, whistled shrilly. "Charley?" he called. "Larry? Oscar? Otto? Hennery? Get down here directly!"

Dusty emerged from his surprise at how neatly it had happened. He reached into Walter's coat pocket and took out the paper with Elwell's Equation on it. Now he was safe, and so was Canal Street, 1880. As for what would happen when Walter recovered from his strange attack — well, they would see.

THE staff came out of the elevator cage with interest written large and plain upon their faces. Ben had evidently found time from his errand to drop a few words. Major Hennaberry gestured toward Walter, reclining, gray-faced, against the solicitous Mr. Rat

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Nolan, who held him in a firm grip.

"Gent is took bad," the Major explained. "Couple of you go out and see if you can find a cab — Snow Ferguson or Blinky Poole or one of those shunsoaps — and tell them to drive up by the alley. No sense in lugging this poor gent out the front."

Franz, Larry and Charley nodded and went out.

Otto stared. "No more vooden Indians, if he gets his vay," he said dismally at last. "Ho, Chesus," he moaned.

Dusty began, "Major, this is all so — "

"Now don't be woritting about your brother-in-law," said Rat Nolan soothingly. "For Dr. Coyle is a sovereign hand at curing what ails all pasty-faced, consumptive types like this one."

Dusty said that he was sure of it. "Where is Dr. Coyle's office these days?" he asked.

Mr. Rat Nolan coughed lightly, gazed at a cobweb in a corner of the ceiling. "The southwest passage to Amoy by way of the Straights is what the Doc is recommending for his patients — and he insists on accompanying them to see they follows doctor's orders, such being the degree of his merciful and tender-loving care . . ."

Dusty nodded approvingly.

"Ah, he's a rare one," said R. Nolan with enthusiasm, "is Bully Coyle, master of the *Beriah Jaspers* of the Black Star Line! A rare one and a rum one, and the Shanghaiing would be a half-dead trade without 'm, for it does use up men. And they leave on the morning tide."

THERE was a noise of *clomp-clomp* and metal harness-pieces jingled in the alley. Charley, Larry and Hennery came in, followed by a furtive-looking cabman with a great red hooked nose — Snow Ferguson, presumably, or Blinky Poole, or one of those shunsoaps.

"Ah, commerce, commerce," Rat Nolan sighed. "It waits upon no man's pleasure." He went through unconscious Walter's pockets with dispatch and divided the money into equal piles. From his own, he took a half-eagle which had been slightly scalloped and handed it to Dusty. "Share and share alike, and here's the regular fee. That's the spirit what made America great. Leave all them foreign monarchs beware . . . Give us a lift with the gent here, cullies . . ."

Charley took the head, Hennery and Otto the arms, while Larry and Ben held the feet. Holding the door open, the cabman observed, "Damfino-looking shoes this coffee-cooler's got on."

"Them's mine," said Rat Nolan instantly. "He'll climb the rigging better without 'em. Mind the door, cullies — don't damage the merchandise!"

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DOWN the dim aisles the procession went, past the fly-figures, scout-figures, rosebuds, pompeys, Highlandmen, and Turks. The gas-jets flared, the shadows danced, the sachems scowled.

"If he comes to and shows fight," Major Hennaberry called, "give him a tap with the mallet, one of you!" He turned to Dusty, put a hand on his shoulder. "While I realize, my boy, that no man can be called to account for the actions of his brother-in-law in this Great Republic of ours, still I expect this will prove a lesson to you. From your silence, I perceive that you agree. Your sister now — hate to see a lady's tears — "

Dusty took a deep breath. The air smelled deliciously of fresh wood and paint. "She'll adjust," he said. Mary would be quite well off with the money from his investments. So there was no need, none at all, for his return. And if the WIS tried to follow him, to make more trouble, why—there was always Rat Nolan.

"Major Hennaberry, sir," he said vigorously, "we'll beat Demuth's yet. You remember what you said when the catalog came out, about the power of advertising? We'll run their metal monsters into the ground and put a wooden fly-figure on every street block in America!"

And they did.

— AVRAM DAVIDSON

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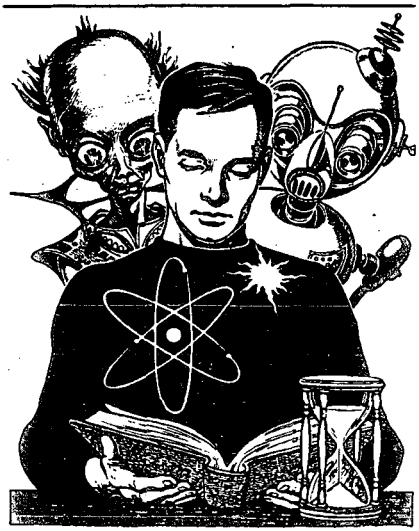

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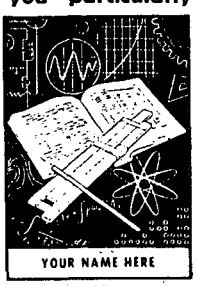

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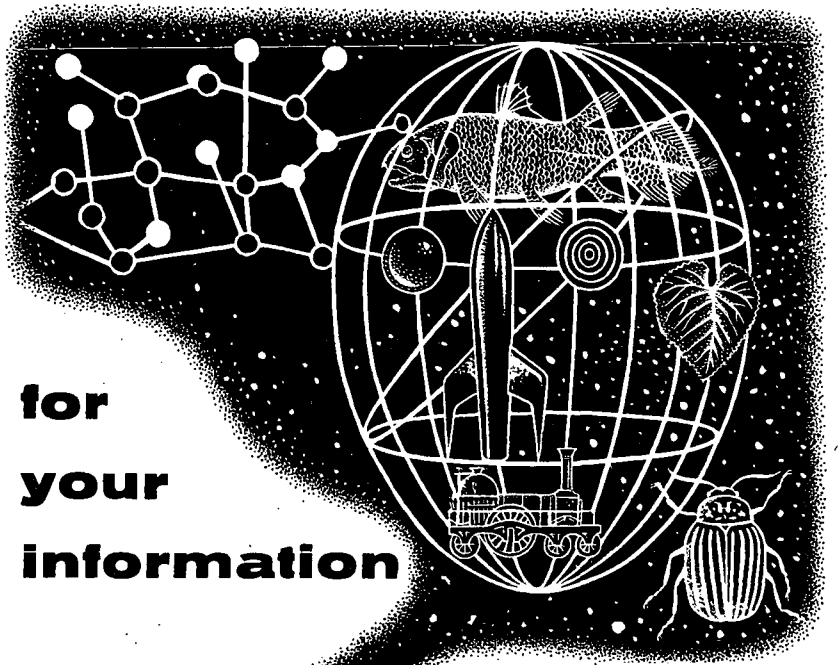

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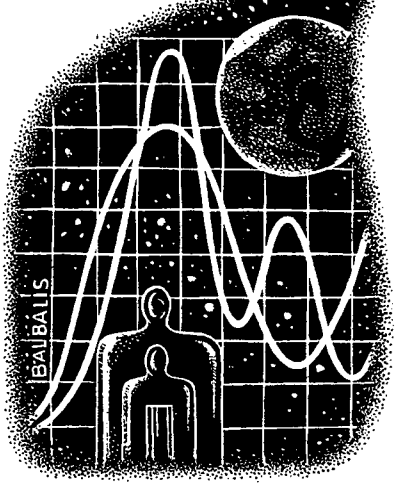

BY WILLY LEY

ANY QUESTIONS?

ELSEWHERE in this issue, the editor reports on the poll of reader's opinions as to how they want the big new GALAXY to look. At the moment of writing my own piece, I only know what has been passed on to me by way of an inter-office memo, which states that two main points were made by the readers with regard to this column. One is that the readers want "more speculation." The other is that they want the "Any Questions?" section restored.

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As regards the first point, I thought of a story I once read or heard: namely, that a genuinely wise man (in France, I believe) advised the professional wise men who deal with horoscopes and related devices to put all their prophecies so far into the future that the customer cannot possibly live long enough to check on whether they will come true.

The reason I remember this story in connection with the request for "more speculation" is GALAXY'S new schedule on the one hand and the NASA's (these letters stand for National Aeronautics and Space Administration), promised schedule of one artificial satellite per month. And there are, in addition, Army and Air Force programs which are more closely tied to military needs, but which can and will result in things going into orbits: around the Earth, around the Moon and around the Sun. And the Russian Academy of Science must have a program, too.

IN the past, I have occasionally risked predicting an event in the space and satellite field. This is a risk I can no longer take, for space programs nowadays move so fast that even daily newspapers have trouble keeping up with them. Speculation, therefore, can be applied only to fields where an informed guess isn't likely to be proved or disproved before it even appears in print. In other fields, though, the wish for speculation will be treated as an order.

As for the request for the return of the "Any Questions?" section, I am able to oblige — glad to, in fact. That section quietly disappeared only for the reason that the readers did not feed it properly. I'm not saying that I did not get a fair number of questions every month. But most of them were so narrow in interest that I felt that they did not have enough appeal for most readers. Sometimes I got a question, or several, with stamped return envelope enclosed and the request: please reply at once; I can't wait for publication. On the assumption that these letters came from people who had exams coming up or were eager to collect a bet, I complied when I could.

But while I am *still* short of written questions, I am abundantly supplied with oral ones. I spent most of the fall and winter traveling through the United States for the purpose of filling lecture engagements. After every lecture there is an official question-and-answer period, but I do not refer to these sessions which are part of the program. By now I know which questions are going to be asked.

Just to see whether I myself caused such a predictable set of questions in some manner peculiar only to me, I spent one evening attending a lecture by Dr. Wernher

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von Braun to find out what the audience might throw at him. If I had had a list of the questions asked of me two days earlier in Detroit, and had made another list of the questions asked of Wernher von Braun that night, they would have shown an overlap of better than eighty per cent.

The questions I have in mind for this column are the ones which came up after the official question-and-answer periods. Somebody (and he or she was usually a science fiction reader) would come up with something that could not be answered immediately. Sometimes the arithmetic involved was such that it could not be done without pencil and paper (especially not after nearly two hours of public speaking and while being driven to the airport). Sometimes I did not know the answer, but merely knew where it can be looked up.

I can't credit any names. After many weeks of traveling and speaking, I simply do not remember them. But each one of the questions in the following actually was asked.

THE SPACESHIP WITH STEADY ACCELERATION

THE spaceship with the steady acceleration came up three times: once from a newspaperman at Cape Canaveral, once from a teacher (female) in Fayetteville, N. C., and once from an airplane pilot in Lubbock, Texas. In all three cases, the figures were the same too: namely, the obvious one of a steady acceleration of one "g." If we could build a ship which would travel with one "g" of steady acceleration, the people inside would feel as if they were on the ground. But how fast would they be going how soon?

There is a complication here. If such a ship took off from the ground, the people inside would naturally feel an acceleration of two "g," one "g" being due to the acceleration of the ship and the other due to the gravitational acceleration caused by the gravitational field of the Earth. So we agreed that we would first let the ship climb very gently to a distance of 200,000 miles, where the Earth's gravitational field is still present, of course, but can be called negligible.

From that point on, we decided to travel at one "g" acceleration for precisely one day, or 24 hours, or 86,400 seconds. Now the velocity at the end of the day would be $v = at$. The value for "t" is 86,400; the value of the acceleration, expressed in meters per second, is 9.81. Now you just multiply, getting 847,584 meters per second as your final velocity at the end of that day. This is the equivalent of 526.66 miles per second. Pretty fast, but how far did they get?

The formula for the distance "s"

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traveled is $s = t^2a/2$; you square the time and multiply it by half of the acceleration used. The result is 36,558,800 kilometers or 22.7 million miles. This would be halfway to the orbit of Mars. Such a ship could effect a landing on Mars about two days after takeoff — if it could be built and if enough energy were somehow available.

I feel rather sure that I won't live to see such a ship, but even under such steady acceleration, it would take some time until the speed of light was approached. Which remark inevitably produces the question of whether the speed of light can be passed or not.

When that question comes up now, I always repeat the answer I gave to my elder daughter when she asked this at the breakfast table half a year ago. She was then, which is of some importance to the story, only a few weeks older than 14 years. After she asked that question, I looked at her seriously and said: "Sandra, this is for your son to worry about, not us."

DR. EINSTEIN AND THE SPEED OF LIGHT

ONE frequent oral question, which also came in by mail several times, is what Dr. Einstein, if he were still alive, would say to the following problem. A spaceship, Dr. Einstein maintained, coud not reach the speed of light. But he probably would have admitted that a spaceship might move with 60 per cent of the speed of light. Now if two ships each move with 60 per cent of the speed of light, but move away from each other, they would move with more than the speed of light relative to each other, wouldn't they?

Or in another version: let's say, a spaceship moves at half the speed of light. Then its captain switches on the ship's nose searchlight, which shines forward. Since the light from the searchlight moves with the speed of light, but the ship carrying it already moves with half the speed of light, what would Dr. Einstein say?

My offhand guess is that he would groan.

But I can tell how he explained such things to his students. Let us first assume a tank moving forward at a fair clip on a road. We'll call its speed V. Now the tank man fires his gun forward without stopping. The velocity of the shell relative to the tank shall be called "v." The velocity of the shell relative to the road is then obviously $V + v$.

This simple formula is the one everybody uses and Dr. Einstein would have admitted that it works for practical purposes. But he would have insisted that $V + v$ is a simplified formula. The correct or complete formula for the speed of the shell relative to the ground would be:

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$$\frac{V + v}{1 + \frac{V \times v}{c^2}}$$

namely, tank speed plus shell velocity divided by "1" plus the product of these two velocities divided by the square of the speed of light. Now if V and v are tiny when compared to the speed of light (which they normally are), the formula acquires the shape of:

$$\frac{V + v}{1 + 0}$$

which is the same as $V + v$.

Now let us try this for the spaceship and the searchlight beam, but to make it easier, we'll assume that the spaceship is traveling with the speed of light itself. We'll call the ship's velocity V and that of the searchlight beam c (since it is light traveling). Then the formula looks like this:

$$\frac{V + c}{1 + \frac{V \times c}{c^2}}$$

which can be written more simply as:

$$\frac{V + c}{1 + V/c}$$

or still simpler:

$$\frac{c\,(V + c)}{(c + V)}$$

but this is just a complicated manner of just writing "c."

You always end up with the speed of light, never more.

Yes, it contradicts "common sense," but that is how Einstein's formula reads. What the next generation or the one after that will do with this formula is something I can't even remotely guess at.

THE FIRST RUSSIAN RESEARCH ROCKETS

LET us return to the ground now for a short while and deal with people who were always thought to be more groundbound than anybody else on this planet — the Russians.

Usually, when I have a public lecture, I tell the story of how Konstantin Eduardovitch Ziolkovsky wrote the first scientific treatise on rocketry in 1898 and submitted it to the editor of the monthly popular scientific journal *Na-ootchnoye Obozrayniye* ("Science Survey"), who required five years to make up his mind to publish it, so that it was printed in 1903. I use this story in my lecture to indicate the date of Ziolkovsky's birthday.

According to the (old style) Julian calendar in use in Russia when Ziolkovsky was born, his birthday was the 5th of September, 1857. But after the Russian revolution, the Soviets adopted the Gregorian calendar and now refer to events before the revolution with the dates they would have had if

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the Gregorian calendar had been in use then.

This re-dates Ziolkovsky's birthday as the 17th of September, 1857, which is the date that was actually at the head of any daily newspaper on that day across the border in Germany or in nearby Sweden. The reason for making this point is, of course, that Ziolkovsky's hundredth birthday, September 17, 1957, was the intended date for the shooting of Sputnik I.

After the lecture, there is always at least one person who wants to know how we know that Ziolkovsky actually wrote such a treatise. The answer to that is simple: I own a copy of it; Ziolkovsky mailed it to me in 1931. But, somebody else will ask then, did that man make experiments? No, he didn't. Aha, still another person will chortle, they did not experiment until they captured all those Germans!

Well, it so happens that the first Russian to experiment with liquid-fuel rockets had a German name. But in spite of that name, he was a Russian; moreover, he began experimenting in 1933. His name was Friedrich Arturovitch Zander and he published a book on rocket theory and on ideas about experiments in 1932. (I have a copy of that book, too.) Zander's first rocket motor to work (some earlier models may easily have blown up) produced a thrust of 110 pounds. In his book, Zander proposed a small airplane as test vehicle for his rocket motors. I don't know whether he actually did this. Nor do I know his whereabouts now or even whether he is still alive.

The first Russian research rocket we know of was built in 1935 by M. K. Tikhonravov (now often mentioned in connection with Russian artificial satellites) with a motor by L. S. Dushkin. Burning kerosene with nitric acid (a fuel combination still used in Russian research rockets), this rocket rose to a height of about six miles. The last Russian experiment before the Second World War was just what Zander had had in mind: a glider with a rocket motor. This rocket motor was Dushkin's, too.

THE BEST SIZE FOR AN ARTIFICIAL SATELLITE

SPEAKING of Russians, we have to talk about their satellites. *Pravda,* every once in a while, ran a tabulation of satellite weights and orbits, stressing the fact that the biggest of the Russian satellites weighs 1½ tons while ours carried an instrument load of not quite 20 pounds.

This discrepancy was, of course, one of the recurrent questions and I won't go into this at this point. But one young man in Orlando, Florida, who identified himself as a science fiction and especially a GALAXY reader, added a new twist.

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He asked me whether there was an "optimum size" for an artificial satellite. Maybe, he added, ours are too small, but isn't it possible that the Russian satellites are too big?

There was not enough time to go into this problem and I did promise to tell him in print, which I am now doing.

The problem began with thinking about the weight (and incidentally size) an artificial satellite would have to have. This was not too simple, as I can testify, because I ran into this problem once. During the winter of 1946-47, I began to wonder what would have to be added to the only then existing rocket, the V-2, to launch a satellite with it. This, in turn, brought up the question whether current rocket fuels were powerful enough for satellite launching. This led to the question of how much payload these fuels would have to carry into an orbit.

I hopefully acquired a number of catalogues of instrument-making companies and began to go through them. Well, everything was carefully stated, physical principles, performance, adjustment range, often even the size. Did anybody mention the weight? Usually not! The reason was that these instruments were meant to be used in laboratories. Maybe on shipboard. The designers had taken into consideration that they might be carted around in automobiles and had provided carrying cases and often pointed out that the construction was "rugged, for student use."

I finally gave up, assumed that the satellite would have to weigh 200 pounds, and went ahead with my attempt to find out whether a three-stage rocket for known fuels with satellite capability (as they now say) was possible at all. It was.

Some six years later, Dr. S. Fred Singer published the first detailed design of an artificial satellite, without paying attention to what rocket would carry it. The design was MOUSE, *M*inimum *O*rbital *U*nmanned *S*atellite of *E*arth. Note that the first letter stands for *Minimum* and Dr. Singer said that it would weigh about 100 pounds. This was in 1953.

Two years or so later, when Vanguard was discussed, the instrument men first talked about a 30-inch sphere weighing 40 pounds, which they then reduced to a 20-inch sphere weighing 22 pounds. Some, but not all, of this steady scaling down reflected the progress of the instrument makers who, once the challenge existed, were quite successful in making things lighter and smaller.

LOOKING at reality — that is, the satellites which are in orbit or which have been in orbit — it must be kept in mind that only one of them was put there by a rocket

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designed for satellite launching. This is the little 3¼ pound Vanguard test satellite. All the others were put into orbit by rockets in operational use that were adapted for the purpose.

The fact that they were in operational use makes their performance more reliable. But the satellite weight then has to be what these rockets which happen to be available can put into orbit.

The Jupiter-C rocket could manage up to 38 pounds, of which 12 pounds are the empty casing of the top stage. The Jupiter-C could not carry a higher weight into orbit. On the other hand, the big Russian missiles also had to carry the weights they did carry. If they had carried less, the payload would have been shot into space, but it would not have gone into orbit around the Earth.

So much for the story of the problem and for the existing facts. Now back to the question of whether there is an optimal weight.

It is easy to show that a satellite could be too small. The Vanguard test satellite would be fairly useless if the silicon solar batteries had not come along, so that it could emit a radio signal by which it could be tracked. (It must be mentioned that at least one skilled amateur astronomer on the West Coast managed to see the test satellite with his telescope, knowing when and where it should be in the sky.) Without solar batteries, the test satellite would be too small to be useful. Of course, a 3¼ pound plastic and aluminum balloon inflated in orbit would be large enough for visual tracking, but this is another type of satellite again.

And that is really the point of the answer. The optimum size of a satellite depends on what it is supposed to do. Let us take a type of satellite which is likely to be large and heavy as an example. If we want a TV camera in orbit for cloud-cover research, we have to carry a TV camera. We have to carry the broadcasting equipment. We have to carry a power source. We also have to provide a mechanism which will steady the satellite and aim the camera. There has to be a power source for this purpose, too.

What all this will weigh is impossible for me to estimate. But let's say that one designer can do all this at a weight of 2500 pounds. If another designer can do it at a weight of 1750 pounds and do it with equal reliability and for the same duration, the second satellite is demonstrably superior.

NOW let us take another example of lighter weight. We want a bunch of radiation counters in orbit, say a dozen. One of them should be completely unshielded; the others shielded to different degrees with different lead shields.

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The unshielded counter will report all radiation. The one with the heaviest lead shielding will report only the most energetic sub-atomic particles. The ten counters in between will report different energy levels of the particles that hit them. All this has to be broadcast to the ground, to be sure, so a transmitter is needed. The overall weight of this would probably be on the order of 30 pounds.

If, in the TV satellite, the rocket had originally been built for the 2500-pound design, but in the meantime the 1750-pound design had come along, we would now have enough spare payload to add several sets of the radiation counter assembly and get all the measurements we want with the one heavy satellite. Wouldn't we?

No, we wouldn't.

We'd get measurements, all right, but only from the orbit that is the best for TV cloud-cover measurements, which might be an orbit that is nearly circular and 4000 miles away. But we want such radiation count from many places. We want an orbit that is nearly circular and quite low, say 200 miles on the average. We also want this orbit to go over both magnetic poles. Then we want an orbit that is also nearly circular, but over the equator, and, on the average, 1500 miles from the ground. Then we want an orbit which is over the equator but quite eccentric, with a perigee at perhaps 200 miles and an apogee 6000 miles away.

In short, we want several different orbits for the same type satellite. Which simply means that we need as many satellites as there are orbits worth investigating. Offhand, I can think of about ten different orbits just for radiation measurements. This figure does not include possible failures (and in this case a satellite that goes into an orbit, but not one of the desired ones, might be counted as a failure) and repeats. Repeats will be necessary because the measurements should cover a number of years to provide a really complete and reliable picture.

Even if these satellites do a few other things in addition to radiation measurements (such as taking their own temperatures and reporting on hits by micro-meteorites), they can still be quite small. For exploratory purposes, and that is the phase at which we are now, several small satellites are infinitely superior to one large one. Large ones will be needed too, if the equipment they have to carry happens to be heavy, but for quite some time to come, they will not replace the small ones.

THE AUSTRALIAN SHOE SIZE PUZZLE

TO end all this on a somewhat lighter note, let me recall a luncheon in Chicago with advertis-

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ing and newspaper people where the so-called Australian shoe size puzzle came up. This does not mean that shoe sizes in Australia are puzzling, at least no more than anywhere else, but that it was thought up in Australia.

One of the men present had just heard it from an Australian advertising man. It ran as follows:

"Miss S.," he said, "don't tell us your shoe size, but think of it and double the number."

Miss S. nodded, wondering what would come next.

"If this is an even number, leave it alone. If it is an odd number, subtract one."

"Even," said Miss S.

"All right, now add 39 to this number."

Miss S. nodded.

"Now multiply this by five."

At that point, Miss S. fished a pencil out of her purse and started defacing the back of a menu.

"When you have the result, write it down and tack an eight onto it, like another digit. This should be a four-digit figure now."

Miss S. indicated that it was.

"Now subtract the year in which you were born from this figure. What's the result?"

She read off a figure which sounded as if it made absolutely no sense, after all these operations.

But the man who had started the whole thing smiled and said: "So you wear a size five, which is about what I guessed, but I didn't know you are thirty."

IT so happened that Miss S. did not mind this information being divulged, but by then everybody wanted to see the procedure in detail, so she had to go through the sequence once more.

Size 5 doubled makes 10. (If it had been size 5½, the resulting odd figure, 11, would have had to be reduced by one.) Adding 39 makes 49. Multiplied by five makes 245. Tack on an 8 at the end and you get 2458. Subtract the year of birth (1928) makes 530, which is size 5, age 30.

Several more menus were then spoiled and it always worked out neatly. This is as far as the proceedings went on that day. I expect that more paper will be spoiled now in a number of homes, so I'll give a hint. The conversation took place in 1958 and an "8" had to be tacked on at the end. Since you'll be doing this in 1959, you'll have to tack on a "9" or else every victim's age will come out one year younger than it really is.

— WILLY LEY

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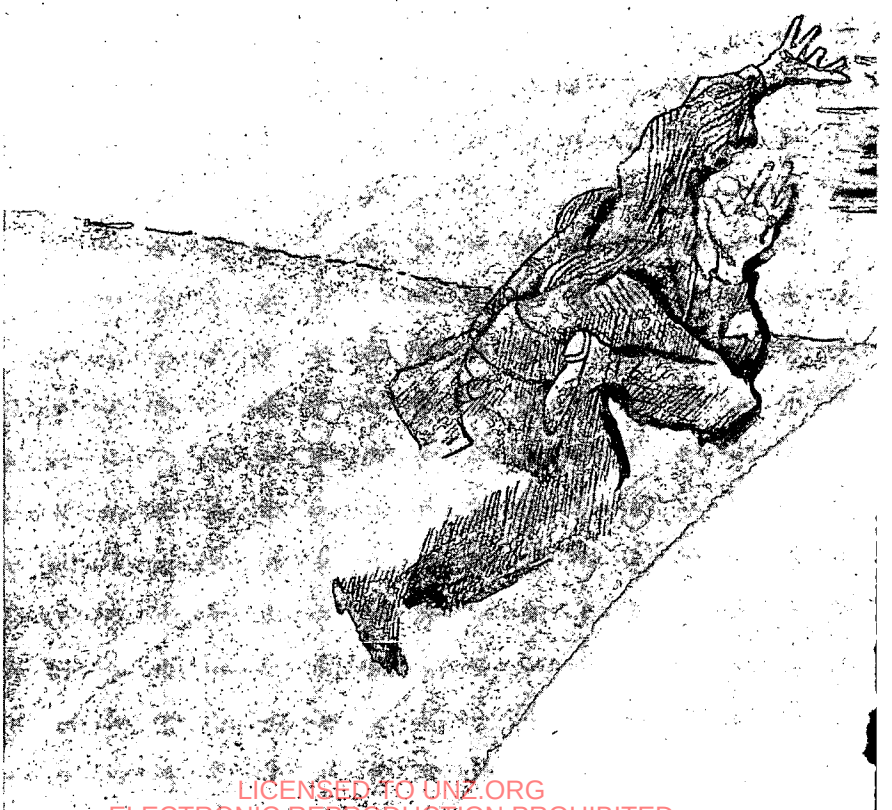
Traveling Companion Wanted

To share exps., relieve at wheel—must be able drive under grt. pressure—in return transp. doz. mi. or so under ocean bottom!



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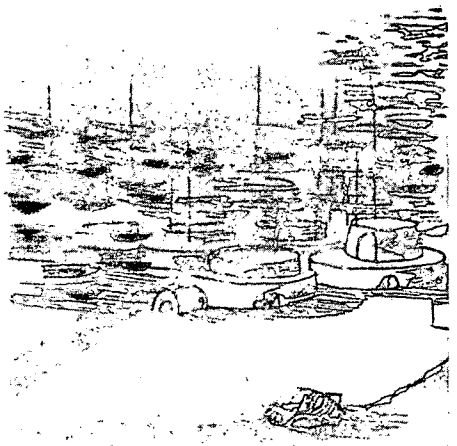
YOU remember Regan. He's the man who fell overboard in a spacesuit and found that there really is a passage to India. It winds down from the Champion Deep in the Atlantic and comes out somewhere off Bombay. It took Regan a week to pop in one end of that underworld river and emerge at the other. He was delirious when he bobbed to the surface and was picked up by the Chinese motorship. Starved, of course; had to spend a long time in the hospital after he'd been transferred to shore.



Illustrated by DILLON

The newspapers and radio and television made quite a thing of it. Reporters managed to interview Regan while he was still weak and maybe talking a little crazy. They got together afterward and agreed among themselves on what parts to leave out. Then Regan sold the first-person rights to a syndicate. He insisted on writing the installments himself, but a lot was edited out while the staff writer was redoing it.

I didn't hear Regan's unpublished story till I met him in the bar at the Palmer House in Chicago. He'd been attending a geophysical meeting that I'd had to cover and we'd both got bored with it about the same time. I thought I recognized him from his pictures and said so. Regan seemed glad to have a nonlonghair to talk to, and he talked.

You know why Regan had been

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wearing a spacesuit in the first place; he'd become something of a hero on the return trip of one of the Earth-Mars hops after a meteor struck. Regan went out through the airlock to make repairs. It was his job as chief of maintenance. Patched up the hole and went back in. Routine, he said.

But the skipper messaged a report to Earth, and when the spaceship reached the way station to take on landing fuel, the press was waiting for it. The photographers were along and they wanted Regan to re-enact the repair scene. He didn't want to, but the skipper insisted because it would be good public relations. So Regan climbed into the spacesuit again and took along his mobile repair gear and tinkered away on the hull while the photogs snapped away from a patrol boat.

That was when the repair unit went out of whack.

ITS mobility factor wasn't supposed to do anything more than move him around on the hull to wherever he had to go. He'd worked with it a hundred times in test sessions and once in reality and it'd always been a lamb. But this time it went all screwy and shoved him off the hull. In some way one of the conduits wrapped itself around his arms like an octopus, pinning them so he couldn't reach the controls. And in some other way the tiny rocket engine zipped over to full power and plunged him down toward Earth.

If it had headed him out toward space, it would have been all right. The patrol boat could have overtaken him in a few hours at most and hauled him aboard. But Regan was heading Earthward and soon he was down where the traffic's pretty congested. The patrol boat made some valiant efforts, but after a couple of near misses with transcontinental rockets, it gave up. Better to lose one person than a couple of hundred.

Radio messages were sent to low-flying craft and ships at sea. These didn't do any good, except that a trawler was able to spot the position where Regan, in his spacesuit, smacked the water and went under. The trawler didn't have a radio transmitter. It waited a while, and when nothing came up, it put about for land. A day later, the spot where Regan had gone down was alive with would-be rescue ships, submarines and diving equipment.

But Regan never came up — not in that ocean, at any rate.

I knew this story pretty well, so Regan didn't elaborate on it. He'd blacked out, anyway, soon after he hit the atmosphere and didn't come to till he was close to smacking the surface. That's when it began to get interesting.

You've seen enough undersea movies to know what the ocean is

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like, so we won't go into that. This is what happened when Regan got down to what should have been the bottom:

There was a big crater there, with the bottom stretching away in all directions from the cavity — but the hole itself kept going down. Funnel-shaped, Regan said. He could see it quite clearly because he was plunging into it head down. The tentacles of the conduit were still wrapped around his arms and the mobility gadget's rocket was naturally working almost as well under water as it had in space.

After a while, it got dark, with Regan still zipping along into the depths of the funnel. He'd long since passed the stage of being merely worried; now he was scared. By this time, it was entirely black, but Regan could sense that he was being carried along swiftly.

NOT because he thought it would do any good, but because he had to do something, Regan experimented with his feet. He found that after some back-stretching calisthenics he was able to bring his right boot up near his waist. Maneuvering it with total disregard for his sacroiliac, Regan managed to hook the boot under one of the coils the conduit had made around him. Gradually he was able to loosen it enough to give his left arm some play and from there it was relatively simple. He switched off the rocket engine, switched on his headlamp and looked around.

Regan said it was quite a sight, in a reverse sort of way. Nothing anywhere. With the rocket turned off, he kind of floated around aimlessly, going nowhere in particular. He should have been going up, but that didn't happen. He swirled like a lazy eddy. A school of things that were caricatures of fish — big, white, revolting things — swished over and puckered blindly into his faceplate, then went away. Otherwise there was nothing.

Regan was pretty discouraged. By this time, he'd been in a slow spin for so long that he had no idea which way was up. He had the equipment for getting up — there were about two hundred hours of fuel in the rocket engine strapped to his back — but no way seemed any better than another.

He remembered that the funnel had steadily narrowed and so he tried experimental bursts from the engine to see if he could reach one of the sides. Eventually he got to something that wasn't water. It was a sort of mud. Regan studied the markings on it for a possible clue. No go. Regan was a spaceman, not an oceanographer.

So, since it was better than doing nothing, Regan got himself into a drift parallel with the mud side and switched on his rocket.

He whizzed along at a good rate,

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staying close to the mud wall, but not knowing whether he was going down, up or around in circles at the same depth. After what he judged to be some hours of this, the mud began to be streaked with a gray substance and, still farther along, it appeared to become rock. Regan didn't know whether this was good or bad.

More hours went by, apparently. Regan was wearing a watch, but it was hidden under the heavy sleeve of his spacesuit. He dozed off, he said, and when he snapped back into consciousness he noticed that there was another wall, far off, opposite the one he was rocketing along.

It was gray, too, as far as he could make out in the light of his headlamp, which was weak over distances. What woke him up fully was something that went skimming past him at a much greater rate than his own. It was a cask, its wood brown as if from long submersion and its hoops rusted into redness. The cask was turning lazily end over end, but it outdistanced him and disappeared ahead as he watched. It had been traveling out in the middle of the passage.

REGAN pondered this for a while and then reasoned that there was a swift current, swifter in the middle even than his rocket propulsion at the side of the channel. He worked himself out toward the center, then switched off his rocket, experimentally. By watching the rock side of the passage, he was able to gauge that he was moving much faster.

The watching, however, had a hypnotic effect on him and Regan felt himself dozing off. He tried to fight it but reasoned finally that there wasn't much point. So he turned off his headlamp and let himself go to sleep.

He felt weird when he woke up. He was hot and sweating. He remembered instantly where he was. It was no comfort to him. He felt entirely hopeless, even more so than if he'd been marooned in space. At least there was traffic out there. Here there was just himself, with a wooden cask up ahead and nightmarish fish somewhere behind.

He also felt weak. Spacesuits come equipped with water, of course, if they're the repair variety, and Regan drank sparingly through the tube at the base of his faceplate. But his suit carried no rations, so he tried to ignore his hunger.

He drowsed again and switched off his headlamp. This became a pattern for him — a semi-conscious nightmare of smooth, eerie motion, punctuated with sips at his water supply and hopeless watching through the faceplate, blinking away the sweat. Regan talked to himself, he said, and sometimes

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sang, to keep himself sane in the silence and loneliness. It probably helped, although some of his talk was pretty idiotic.

It was after one of his dozes — whose duration he had no way of measuring even by his thirst and hunger, which were constant — that he awoke to something new. Automatically he switched on his headlamp, then switched it off again, realizing what the newness was.

The passage he was being washed through was no longer dark; there was a radiance in the water now.

Regan twisted himself around to see what the light came from. Up ahead, apparently. As it got stronger, his eyes began to ache. It was a gorgeous ache, Regan said, and he stared ahead almost hypnotized. He made an effort and focused on the walls of the passageway he was being thrust along. They were white with streaks of black in them — like marble, but without marble's glossy hardness. He could see all parts of the tunnel now; it was roughly circular and had narrowed to a diameter of about two hundred feet.

Regan could only suppose that he was nearing the surface — that he'd been sweeping through some U-shaped fissure — and he adjusted himself kinesthetically to the theory that he was now traveling up instead of down. This took a lot of doing and occupied his mind.

His spirits soared with his imagined ascent and he could visualize himself traveling faster and faster until, with a pop, he would be thrust into the air and fall back to float on the surface. Regan wanted most desperately to be able to look at the sky again. It would be kind to see land, too, but a ship or a plane would do temporarily.

HE was half lost in this reverie when he had to make a second adjustment. Remember, he thought he was going up, as from the bottom of a well. Therefore he was puzzled, as the radiance increased to daylight strength, to see one wall of his tubular, water-filled prison darken to deep green while the other turned a sort of blue-white-pink.

He was moving in the same swift rush of current, his body positioned so that he was facing the green half. He twisted as if to face the opposite way in an elevator and then became giddy when the entire concept of his surroundings did a ninety-degree flop.

In that split second, Regan realized that he wasn't traveling vertically, but horizontally.

The well he had pictured himself in now took on the aspect of a river, with the bright blend of colors the sky, and the deep green the river bed. The banks of the river were above him. Regan gave himself a tiny rocket assist to rise.

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He wasn't at all prepared for what he saw. Far away beyond the green plain through which the river was racing was a city.

Unmistakably it was a metropolis of Man, not towering or turreted, but massive and with a relative newness which spoke of life. And as he had this thought, he could see other, smaller dwellings closer by, one-storied and circular, in a variety of colors.

He noted then that the level of the river was higher than that of the land, that the marblelike banks which channeled the racing water had become a transparent, glasslike substance which rose and curved in a seemingly endless archway. The torrent completely filled the half-transparent tube, flowing smoothly so that he almost had the sensation of flying above the ground.

Regan maneuvered toward the top and from there he saw the road. It paralleled the river and ran in a straight line as far as he could see. While he watched, a vehicle sped along it from behind, paced beside him and then pulled ahead. The driver was only vaguely visible, but he had a reassuringly human appearance. The man in the car, which was a three-wheeled, boxlike affair of brilliant yellow, looked neither left nor right.

Regan yelled instinctively and waved. The cumbersome motion turned him over on his back. Opportunistically, he studied the sky from his new position, but could make nothing of it. There were no clouds, only the blue-white-pink brightness that seemed to extend to infinity.

SOMETHING flashed across his field of vision. Regan caught only a glimpse of it, then reasoned that it must have been a bridge, spanning the enclosed river. He twisted himself around to a prone position and tried to think constructively.

Somewhere there had to be an exit to this land. For his sake, there had to be, although of course this guaranteed nothing. But surely these people made use of this abundant supply of water. It would be fresh and good to drink after its long passage through the Earth, despite its source in the salt ocean. They would use it for irrigation, probably, and perhaps somewhere it was channeled for transportation — of a more comfortable kind than his own. And they might use it for power. Certainly its rushing strength would be tapped.

This thought scared him. He pictured a giant hydroelectric plant into which he would be swept and in the bowels of which his body would be mangled by the blades of a turbine.

He had to slow his mad passage. He maneuvered the equipment attached to his spacesuit and pointed

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the rocket exhaust ahead of him. He flicked on the power and felt his speed being cut. The powerful current pressed from behind him like a live thing, but the rocket thrust was strong, too. His progress slackened to the pace of a canoe.

Balancing himself behind the makeshift braking apparatus was difficult, both because the torrent threatened constantly to turn him end for end, and because his strength was only a memory of itself. But somehow Regan managed to achieve an equilibrium which allowed him to look about and reassure himself that the city was still there. Its position had shifted on the horizon to a point slightly behind him, but there apparently was no end to the expanse of this underground world. The road was there, too, still parallel to the roofed-over river.

A surge of hope went through him as he spotted a man walking along the road.

Regan braked himself still further, until his speed matched that of the man. The man's costume was a brief one — knee-length trousers, a vestlike garment over a white skin, and sandals — so apparently the climate was tropical.

Regan stared hard at the man, mutely begging him to turn. Both Regan's hands gripped the rocket tube; he didn't dare let go to wave. Then, as though he had been reached telepathically, the man looked in Regan's direction. Regan couldn't make out his expression, but apparently it was one of disbelief. The man stopped, took an indecisive step and then ran toward the river. He jogged alongside it and now Regan could see his face clearly.

IT was an intelligent face—round, broad-nosed, the eyes almond-shaped and the hair abundant and black. The man's body was stocky and powerful, graceful as he ran beside the tubed-in river. He waved and smiled, and Regan hoped his own answering smile was visible behind the faceplate of his spacesuit.

Regan doubted that telepathy had anything to do with making the man notice him originally; nevertheless, he thought furiously: "How do I get out of here?"

The response was made more to Regan's obvious predicament than because of thought transference, he was sure; at any rate, the man pointed, then raced ahead.

Regan lost sight of him for an agonizingly long minute or two, then saw him again, standing and pointing up. Another bridge was spanning the river. The man gestured to it emphatically, then pointed ahead again and held up two fingers. Alternately he pointed to the bridge and gestured with his fingers. Regan decided that this meant there would be some sort of

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help for him at the second bridge beyond. He nodded his head vigorously.

The man seemed to see the motion. He nodded and smiled.

Regan cut the power of the rocket engine and let the current speed his journey. The man outside increased his own pace, and when another bridge swept overhead, he nodded and held up one finger. Regan trembled with relief at this confirmation of the pantomimed message. He fought back the weariness that had begun to creep over him again, and clung doggedly to the rocket whose exhaust regulated his speed to that of the running man.

Regan thought the bridge would never be reached. He felt supremely weary. He was sopping wet, his eyes kept going out of focus, his throat ached, and his head was throbbing with jagged pains. It took all his waning strength to cling to consciousness.

FINALLY the bridge was in sight; then overhead. The running man pointed up. Beyond the bridge, the glasslike covering ended.

Regan was out of the tunnel.

The river widened now and its velocity eased. But the current was still a powerful one. Regan pointed the rocket tube so that it thrust him upward. His rubber- and steel-clothed head broke the surface. He felt a surge of freedom.

In his joy, Regan lost control of the rocket-brake and was twisted crazily about. Instinctively he shut off the power; he was swept ahead. As the river whirled him forward, he saw the man on the bank point ahead to the right, wave him on and gesture that he would catch up later.

It was with relief that Regan let himself be carried forward by the strong current. He was traveling out of the mainstream now. In a few minutes, the river was so broad that he seemed to be barely moving, but this was merely an illusion of contrast.

Then Regan saw the mesh fence. It was a giant strainer across the river, apparently fashioned to prevent debris from being carried into the structure which straddled the river beyond — without doubt the hydroelectric plant whose existence he had dreaded.

Regan was swept into the fence. It gave, cushioning the shock, and he pulled himself along it toward the bank. He reached it but lacked the strength to pull himself onto land.

Nearby, hugging the huge mesh fence, was the cask which had passed him back in the dark of the tunnel.

Just as Regan was passing out, he saw the stocky man in the knee-length shorts come into sight, running as fast as he could make his legs pump.

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WHEN Regan came to, he found himself being carried on the back of an open truck. He was lying there like a sack of cabbages, being bounced around as the truck sped over a bumpy road. His undersea friend was squatting next to him on the bed of the truck, holding onto the side to keep from being jolted off.

He smiled when he saw that Regan had regained consciousness and patted the chest of the spacesuit. He pointed in the direction the truck was going, but Regan was flat on his back and weak and couldn't turn to look. The jolting was making him sick.

The road became smoother and soon they entered the city. Regan said it was the damnedest place he ever saw. Everything looked like a beehive. He meant that literally, he said. All the buildings were circular, with doors down at the base and no windows. They were all different sizes and all colors. Some of the bigger ones towered up pretty high, but just how high was hard to say. They weren't built in stories, but in one continuous curving line from bottom to top.

The truck would pass through a square or a park now and again and the buildings in the distance looked like a mass of soap bubbles, all pastel colors under that blue-white-pink sky. The truck stopped in front of a big yellow beehive. Now that he was close and not being jolted around, Regan could see that the building was constructed of a kind of oversized bricks, about a foot square. They weren't joined with mortar, as far as he could tell. Apparently their own weight and shape held them together as they rose up and formed a dome. And the color was within the bricks, not painted on.

Two men, taller than his friend, came out of the building carrying a plank. They loaded Regan onto it and carried him stretcher-fashion into the building. The friend tagged along behind.

There was a sort of anteroom inside, with a man at a desk. The bearers stopped while the man took down a gadget that looked like a chessboard with buttons and pushed down half a dozen of them. Then he held out the board to Regan's friend, who pushed down some of the buttons in a different combination. After that the little friend went away, first patting Regan on the chest and smiling.

Regan was carried into a rotunda in the center of the building. The floor rose and took them to the top level. The bearers carried him off to the side and he saw the floor drop down again. They took him to a windowless room which had light radiating from the walls, and dumped him off the plank-stretcher onto a high stone table. Regan climbed down. He supposed they were being as gentle as possible,

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considering his great weight in the spacesuit.

Regan's weight also manifested itself to him. He felt the heaviness of a person who has been buoyed up for a long time in water, but is now on land.

ALL this happened, except for the clank as he was set down, in complete silence. He was entirely isolated from outside sound, of course.

He lay there, feeling less sick but still hot and dizzy, trying to compose his stomach. After a while, he felt calm enough to drink a little water through the tube inside the faceplate.

A rotund man wearing a kind of white tunic came into his field of vision. Regan could see him only from the waist up. Like the friend he had met at the river, this man had abundant black hair. But his face was fat, with puffy cheeks and sagging jowls. He was much older. His hands were pudgy. He waggled them in what might have been a gesture of delight or greeting; it was hard to say which. His expression was one of pleasure. He stood at Regan's side and smiled at him. His hands felt over the headpiece of the spacesuit, then went thumping down the rest of it.

"I'll be out of the damn thing soon," Regan thought. But apparently it was too much for the fellow. Regan tried to gesture to the fastening at the back of his neck to show how it was done, but he was unable to raise his arms. He realized then how exhausted he was.

The rotund man in the tunic patted him on the chest — it seemed to be a universal gesture — and went away.

Regan felt at peace in the room. He felt that now he was going to be taken care of and that everything, somehow, was going to be all right. He went to sleep.

He woke up ravenously hungry. He seemed to be alone in the room. His encased body felt as heavy as the whole world. He tried to raise up to bring his mouth to the water tube. He couldn't. He cried out in a voice that was weak even inside the confines of his suit. No one could possibly have heard and no one came. He tried to raise his arm. The muscles strained and quivered. By using all his strength, he was able to lift it a few inches above the table. Then the arm fell back on the stone with the barest tap of sound.

The jovial fat one reappeared. He was carrying a metal box with two dials on it and wires coming from it which ended in kinds of suction cups. He stuck one of the cups to Regan's faceplate, fastened another one to his ear and twirled a dial.

"Please get me out of this suit," Regan said.

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The man's face lit up with pleasure. He nodded and patted the chest of the suit. Then he spoke.

The language was a guttural, fast-paced one. Regan had never heard anything like it.

"Please," he said. "Please get me out."

The man continued to smile. He beckoned and two other men appeared. They took turns listening to Regan plead to be released. They smiled, too, though obviously none of them understood a word. Without gestures, it was impossible for Regan to convey his plight.

THEY stood around him, chattering in their outlandish tongue. Others joined them. They all had the same look about them. Friendly, smiling faces and hands that patted him on the chest. It became a confused nightmare as still others streamed in, as if he were the main attraction in a fifty-cent tour.

But apparently there was method in their milling around. They measured him from top to toe, from side to side, in circumference and in depth. They used steel tapes and calipers and jotted down their findings in little books or punched them out on button-studded chessboards. They wheeled in a huge contraption which must have been a camera and clicked it at him from every angle. They lifted his arms and legs and chattered with excitement to see how peculiarly he bent at the joints.

It was as if Regan were a new kind of animal that had swum into their ken and which they were classifying, or which they would classify at their leisure after they had measured it in all possible ways.

They kept it up for an eternity and a half. Regan's vision got hazy, his throat burned and his stomach ached in irregular spasms.

He was barely conscious when the two bearers came back in, loaded him on the plank and took him out into the rotunda. The throng of scientists followed. The floor-wide elevator sank to the main level and they all went out into the street.

A big, rectangular, doorless, bus-like vehicle was standing there. The bearers, with a great deal of effort, propped Regan up in the front seat. His head lolled back inside the suit. The shift in position blacked him out temporarily. He came out of a period of nausea to hear himself saying over and over:

"You open it at the back of the neck. I'd do it myself if I could move my arms. You open it at the back of the neck."

The bus was in motion. It rumbled through the streets among the pastel beehives. In Regan's state, they were so many bouncing balloons being pointed out by madmen in white smocks in a caricature of a vehicle under an impossible sky.

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They eventually reached a kind of park or estate. Shrubs and trees were neatly set out and a big golden beehive stood at the end of a long drive. They took him inside, half fainting, sweating, gibbering to himself.

Through half a dozen anterooms they went, to what could only have been a throne room. It was sumptuously hung with tapestries. There were guards standing at post and a thick carpet led to a dais on which were two huge chairs. A tall, slender, dark-haired man sat in one of them. The other was empty.

There was a confused kind of ceremony in which everyone got down on one knee before the man on the throne, and a ridiculous struggle began, to get Regan into a semblance of the same position.

The king, or whatever he was, gestured, and Regan found himself being dragged up on the dais and sat on the other throne.

Then the nightmare took a turn for the worse. From an anteroom came a procession of women bearing gifts. They were the first women Regan had seen in this underground world, but he was less interested in them than in what they carried.

Food.

Baskets of fruit.

Platters of meat.

Cups of liquids.

The smiling creatures curtsied before the thrones and set out the feast in front of Regan. One of them, dressed in a single pale blue garment belted at the waist, laid a basket of fruit in his lap.

Regan began to quiver in a fever of frustration.

It got worse when, at a sign from the king, everyone helped himself to some of this or that, raised it to Regan in a kind of toast and began to eat.

If any of them noticed that Regan didn't join them, they were polite enough not to take offense.

THE feast over, everyone went for an after-dinner ride. The king went, too, riding in a richly draped palanquin on wheels, ahead of the squared-off bus.

This was the royal tour. Points of interest were visited. Regan's bleary eyes and uncomprehending brain half observed gardens, factories, schools, a sporting event, a parade, a farm and dozens of examples of the culture of the world of people who were kindly starving him to death.

In his semi-delirium, he once reproached himself for being such an unappreciative guest and wondered what they must think of this emissary from outside who was such a cumbersome clod. He had come to them in the strange trappings he apparently preferred, so how could he blame them for respecting his costume and leaving it to him to wear it or remove it as

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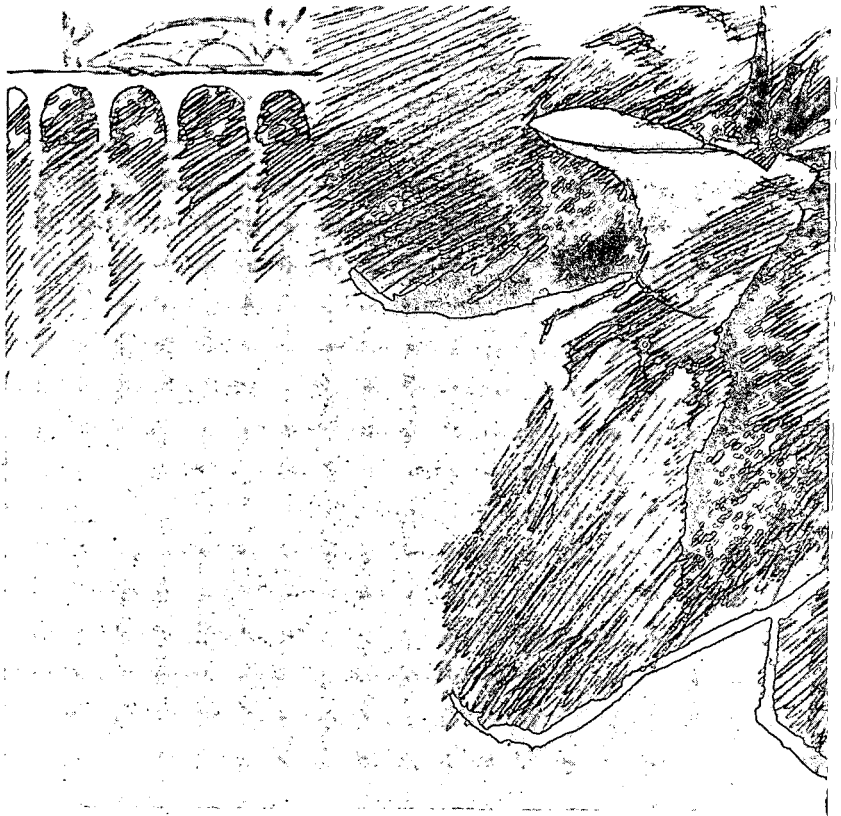

he chose? In his own world, he wouldn't strip a visitor or skin a stray dog.

A bump in the road and the shudder it gave the bus jolted his eyes fully open. Ahead was the hydroelectric plant spanning the river. They were going to show the king where Regan had come from.

The procession pulled over to the bank next to the mesh fence which screened debris from the water flowing into the plant. On the bank lay his mobility unit, which apparently had been detached before they trucked him into the city originally. The king got out of his palanquin and examined it curiously. Then he got back in and they drove along the bank to the other

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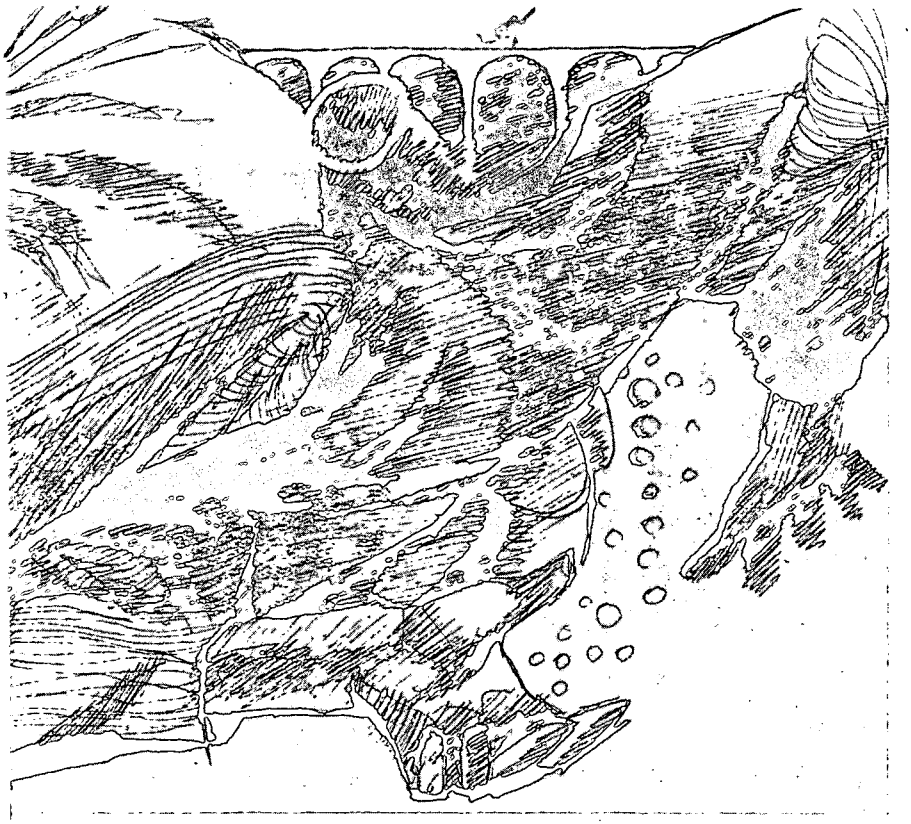

side of the hydroelectric plant. The river continued its swift passage, apparently unslowed by the drain on it.

Regan thought the river looked tremendously inviting. In its depths, he could be free of the well-meaning crowd of sightseeing guides. The river represented peace, an end to being shown around, measured, observed, exhibited and tantalized. In it, he could die calmly, without any frustrating diplomacy.

A bridge spanned the river below the plant. By the gestures of the scientists, he gathered that they were going to cross over to see interesting things which lay across the river. The bridge was a narrow

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wooden one. Parallel to it was the stone framework of an unfinished replacement. They proceeded slowly over the rickety, railless bridge.

The approach to it was banked, so that Regan was tilted in his seat, toward the outside. The bus leveled off as it reached the wooden planking and Regan tilted the other way. A loose plank under a wheel sent him swaying back again. With all his remaining strength, he leaned with the tilt. It was just enough to send him off balance.

They reached out to pull him back, but it was too late. He was out of the bus and dropping the short distance to the water.

The current was so swift that he went only a little way under, then bobbed up and was rushed along, turning over and over. As he revolved, he caught glimpses of consternation on the bridge. He saw the bus back off and race along the road on the bank, hands waving out of it. But it couldn't catch up with him. He was moving too fast.

The even motion of the river was soothing. Regan took a swallow from his tube and relaxed. There was a dull ache in his stomach, but no more stabbing spasms. Maybe he was dying. He didn't care.

REGAN knew he was in a hospital even before he opened his eyes. The ether-and-disinfectant smell told him that.

It was taking an effort to thrust his eyelids up. He moved his arms and felt them close to his body. He raised one hand to his face and rubbed his closed eyes. Of course they'd have got him out of the spacesuit.

He opened his eyes.

A brown-faced man was leaning over the bed. He was wearing a white smock and had a fountain pen in the breast pocket. Beyond the man — the doctor — there was a window. A perfectly ordinary window, through which Regan could see the sky. A blue sky with white clouds in it.

The doctor smiled at Regan and said in English: "How do you feel, son?"

Regan tried to speak but couldn't.

"This is Bombay," the doctor said. "Bombay, in India. It must be quite a surprise to you, but I'm glad to say you'll be all right."

"What?" Regan asked vaguely.

"It's strange, of course," said the doctor. "You should be on the other side of the world, by all that's natural. We communicated with the American authorities when we saw your identification. It is extremely odd. Still, here you are, and you will be well. Quite soon, too."

"But—" Regan began. Then he gave up. He said nothing more until after he'd eaten and slept and the doctor asked him if he felt strong enough now to see the reporters.

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"TWO more, sir?" the bartender at the Palmer House asked.

I nodded.

"Naturally they thought I was delirious," Regan said, "or had been. They had to accept the fact that I'd been through the Earth. Not through the center of it, or anywhere near it — they tell me that's practically solid nickel, or molten, or whatever. But there was no disputing that I'd gone down in the Atlantic and come up in the Indian Ocean. They'd seen me go down and they'd seen me come up and obviously I'd been somewhere in the interval. I hadn't walked, that was for sure.

"They credited my story of the underground river. The Greeks had a word for it, they tell me. The Greeks thought the Alpheus River wandered down under the Adriatic and came up in Sicily. I don't know much about their river, but mine apparently follows the Earth's curve maybe a dozen miles below the surface.

"But nobody wanted any part of my story of the city and the king and the beehive houses and the rectangular bus. Delirium, they said. Oh, they were kind about it, but they said it. So did the geophysical boys upstairs, in their eight-syllabled way."

The bartender brought fresh highballs, but Regan still held the glass the old drink had been in. He put it on its side on the bar and stared at the open end. I got the image — a tunnel filled with rushing water, a tunnel under the world.

Regan almost echoed my thoughts.

"Tunnel under the Antarctic," he said half to himself. "That's where it must have been, that city. Down there, deep under the ice. Used to be tropics, you know."

"The Antarctic?" I said.

"Before the ice came, before the Earth's axis shifted. Those people — they didn't evacuate, I guess. They went underground. Funny they should have built themselves houses the same shape as those of the Eskimos who stayed aboveground in the North — like igloos. But probably that's just coincidence. You don't find igloos in the tropics. I'd guess their beehive houses are naturally influenced by the cavern they live in — their little universe."

REGAN looked up. He grinned and set the empty glass upright on the bar. "I've had a lot of time to think about it. They're awfully nice people, all of them. I could have had a wonderful time if I'd been able to climb out of that damn spacesuit. In time, I could even have communicated with them passably well. Good-looking women, too."

He looked at me speculatively. He opened his mouth as if to speak

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again, then smiled and shook his head.

I said it for him: "You're going back."

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I'm going back. I know the coordinates of the entrance to the passageway and its dimensions and the kind of equipment I'll need. Nothing elaborate. In another year or so, I'll have enough saved up, I think. Get myself a little space launch; one of the smaller ones, lifeboat size. Fit it out with food and water — and some picture books, of course, to show them what it's like where I come from. I'd take somebody along with me if I could find anyone who wanted to go — and who believed me."

"I believe you," I said. "But—"

"Sure. You'd be crazy to go. Wife and kids. I've got none of that. Mostly what I want to do, I guess, is prove those longbeards upstairs are cockeyed."

"I hope you do. Maybe you'll let me write about it when you get back."

"It'll be a good story," Regan assured me.

"I'll be waiting for it," I promised.

That was five years ago. Four years ago, Regan went, as he said he would. He went alone, in a little space launch.

I'm still waiting to write the end of the story.

— RICHARD WILSON

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GALACTICK

EXTRACTS FROM THE

ALMANACK

Music Around the Universe

By LARRY M. HARRIS

Don't take your eye off music . . . there is going to be a lot more to it than meets the ear!

Illustrated by DON MARTIN

THIS first selection deals entirely with the Music Section of the Almanack. Passed over in this anthology, which is intended for general readership, are all references to the four-dimensional doubly extensive polyphony of Green III (interested parties are referred to "Time in Reverse, or the Musical Granny Knot," by Alfid Carp, *Papers of the Rigel Musicological Society*) or, for reasons of local censorship, the notices regarding Shem VI, VII

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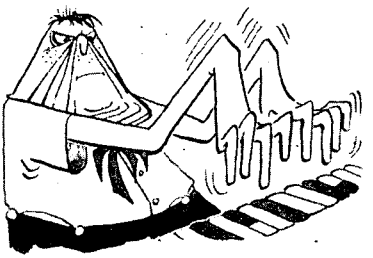
and IX and the racial-sex "music" which is common on those planets.

All dates have been made conformable with the Terran Calendar (as in the standard Terran edition of the Almanack) by application of Winstock Benjamin's Least Square Variable Time Scale.

FEBRUARY 17: Today marks the birth date of Freem Freem, of Dubhe IV, perhaps the most celebrated child prodigy in musical history. Though it is, of course, true that he appeared in no concerts after the age of twelve, none who have seen the solidographs of his early performances can ever forget the intent face, the tense, accurate motions of the hands, the utter perfection of Freem's entire performance.



His first concert, given at the age of four, was an amazing spectacle. Respected critics refused to believe that Freem was as young as his manager (an octopoid from Fomalhaut) claimed, and were satisfied only by the sworn affidavit of Glerk, the well-known Sirian, who was present at the preliminary interviews.

Being a Sirian, Glerk was naturally incapable of dissimulation, and his earnest supersonics soon persuaded the critics of the truth. Freem was, in actuality, only four years old.

In the next eight years, Freem concertized throughout the Galaxy. His triumph on Deneb at the age of six, the stellar reception given him by a deputation of composers and critics from the Lesser Magellanic Cloud when he appeared in that sector, and the introduction (as an encore) of his single composition, the beloved *Memories of Old Age,* are still recalled.

And then, at the age of eleven, Freem's concerts ceased. Music-lovers throughout the Galaxy were stunned by the news that their famed prodigy would appear nc longer. At the age of twelve, Freem Freem was dead.

Terrans have never felt this loss as deeply as other Galactic races, and it is not difficult to see why. The standard "year" of Dubhe IV equals 300 Earth years; to the short-lived Terrans, Freem Freem had given his first concert at the age of 1200, and had died at the ripe old age of 3600 years.

"Calling a 1200-year-old being a child prodigy," states the Terran Dictionary of Music and Musicians,

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rather tartly, "is the kind of misstatement up with which we shall not put."

Particularly noteworthy is the parallel attitude expressed by the inhabitants of Terk I, whose "year" is approximately three Terran days, to the alleged "short" life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

MAY 12: Wilrik Rotha Rotha Delk Shkulma Tik was born on this date in 8080. Although he/she is renowned both as the creator of symphonic music on Wolf XVI and as the progenitor of the sole Galactic Censorship Law which remains in effect in this enlightened age, very little is actually known about the history of that law.

The full story is, very roughly, as follows:

In 8257, a composition was published by the firm of Scholer and Dichs (Sirius), the Concerto for Wood-Block and Orchestra by Tik. Since this was not only the first appearance of any composition by Tik, but was in fact the first composition of any kind to see publication from his planet of Wolf XVI, the musical world was astonished at the power, control and mastery the piece showed.

A review which is still extant stated: "It is not possible that a composition of such a high level of organization should be the first to proceed from a composer — or from an entire planet. Yet we must recognize the merit and worth of Tik's Concerto, and applaud the force of the composer, in a higher degree than usual."

Even more amazing than the foregoing was the speed with which Tik's compositions followed one another. The Concerto was followed by a sonata, Tik's *Tock*, his/her Free-Fall Ballet for Centipedals, *Lights*! *Action*! *Comrades*!, a Symphony, an Imbroglio for Unstrung Violin, and fourteen Wolfish Rhapsodies — *all within the year*!

Scholars visited Wolf XVI and reported once again that there was no musical history on the planet.

Success, fame and money were Tik's. Succeeding compositions were received with an amount of enthusiasm that would have done credit to any musician.

And Wolf XVI seemed to awaken at his/her touch. Within ten years, there was a school of composition established there, and works of astounding complexity and beauty came pouring forth.

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The "great flowering," as it was called, seemed to inspire other planets as well — to name only a few, Dog XII, Goldstone IX and Trent II (whose inhabitants, dwelling underwater for the most part, had never had anything like a musical history).

Tik's own income began to go down as the process continued. Then the astonishing truth was discovered.

Tik was not a composer at all — merely an electronics technician! He/she had recorded the sounds of the planet's main downtown business center and slowed the recording to half-speed. Since the inhabitants of Wolf XVI converse in batlike squeals, this slowing resulted in a series of patterns which fell within sonic range, and which had all of the scope and the complexity of music itself.

The other planets had copied the trick and soon the Galaxy was glutted with this electronic "music." The climax came when a judge on Paolo III aided in the recording of a court trial over which he presided. During the two weeks of subsonic testimony, speech and bustle, he supervised recording apparatus and, in fact, announced that he had performed the actual "arrangement" involved: speeding up the recordings so that the two-week subsonic trial became a half-hour fantasia.

The judge lost the subsequent election and irrationally placed the blame on the recording (which had not been well-received by the critics). Single-handed, he restored the state of pure music by pushing through the Galactic Assembly a censorship rule requiring that all recording companies, musicians, technicians and composers be limited to the normal sonic range of the planet on which they were working.

Tik himself, after the passage of this law, eked out a bare living as a translator from the supersonic. He died, alone and friendliness, in 9501.

JUNE 4: The composition, on this date, in 8236, of Wladislaw Wladislaw's Concertino for Enclosed Harp stirs reflections in musical minds of the inventor and first virtuoso on this instrument, the ingenious Barsak Gh. Therwent of Canopus XII. Nowadays, with compositions for that instrument as common as the *chadlas* of Gh. Therwent's home planet, we are likely to pass over the startling and almost accidental circumstance that led to his marvelous discovery.

As a small boy, Gh. Therwent was enamored of music and musicians; he played the *gleep*-flute before the age of eight and, using his hair-thin minor arms, was an accomplished performer on the Irish (or small open) harp in his fifteenth year. A tendency to con-

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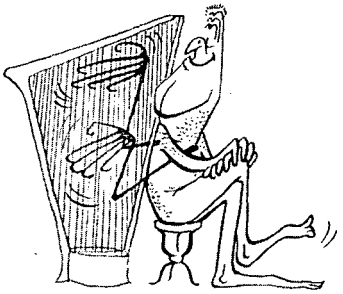

fuse the strings of the harp with his own digital extremities, however, seemed serious enough to rule out a concert career for the young *flalk*, and when an Earth-made piano was delivered to the home of a neighbor who fancied himself a collector of baroque instruments, young Gh. was among the first to attempt playing on it.

Unfortunately, he could not muster pressure sufficient in his secondary arms and digits to depress the keys; more, he kept slipping between them. It was one such slip that led to his discovery of the enclosed strings at the back of the piano (a spinet).

The subtle sonorities of plucked strings at the back of a closed chamber excited him, and he continued research into the instrument in a somewhat more organized manner. Soon he was able to give a concert of music which he himself had arranged — and when Wladislaw Wladislaw dedicated his composition to Gh., the performer's future was assured.

The rest of his triumphant story is too well known to repeat here. The single observation on Gh. Therwent's playing, however, by the composer Ratling, is perhaps worthy of note.

"He don't play on the white keys, and he don't play on the black keys," said Ratling, with that cultivated lack of grammar which made him famous as an eccentric. "He plays in the cracks!"

JULY 23: On this date, the Hrrshtk Notes were discovered in a *welf*-shop cellar on Deneb III.

These notes are, quite certainly, alone in their originality, and in the force which they have had on the growth of subsequent musicians.

To begin at the beginning: it is well established that Ludwig Hrrshtk, perhaps the most widely known Denebian composer, died of overwork in his prime. His compositions, until the famous T85 discoveries of G'g Rash, were almost alone in their universal appeal. Races the Galaxy over have thrilled to Hrrshtk's Second Symphony, his Concerto for Old Men, and the inspiring Classic Mambo Suite. It is, as a matter of fact, said that G'g Rash himself was led to his discovery by considering the question:

"How can many different races, experiencing totally different emotions in totally different ways, agree on the importance of a single musical composition by Hrrshtk? How

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can all share a single emotional experience?"

His researches delved deeply into the Hrrshtk compositions, and a tentative theory based on the Most Common Harmonic, now shown to have been totally mistaken, led to the T85 discoveries.

The Hrrshtk notes, however, found long afterward, provide the real answer.

Among a pile of sketches and musical fragments was found a long list — or, rather, a series of lists. In the form of a Galactic Dictionary, the paper is divided into many columns, each headed with the name of a different planet.

Rather than describe this document, we are printing an excerpt from it herewith:

DENEB III	TERRA	MARS	FOMALHAUT II	SIRIUS VII
Love	Anger	Hunger	Sadness	Madness
Hate	Joy	F'rit	Prayer	Love
Prayer	Madness	Sadness	Full	Joy
Vilb	NPE	Non-F'rit	Golk	NPE

In completed form, the document contains over one hundred and fifty separate listings for race, and over six hundred separate emotional or subject headings. In some places (like the Terra and Sirius listing for Vilb, above), the text is marked NPE, and this has been taken to mean No Precise Equivalent. For instance, such a marking appears after the Denebian *shhr* for both Terra and Mars, although Sirius has the listing *grk* and Fomalhaut *plarat in the desert.*

Hrrshtk may be hailed, therefore, as the discoverer of the Doctrine of Emotional Equivalency, later promulgated in a different form by Space Patrol Psychiatrist Rodney Garman. Further, the document alluded to above explains a phrase in Hrrshtk's noted letter to Dibble Young, which has puzzled commentators since its first appearance.

Hrrshtk is here alluding to the composition of his Revolutionary Ode, which all Terra knows as the most perfect expression of true love to be found in music:

"It's a Revolutionary Ode to me, my friend — but not to you. As we say here, one man's mood is another man's passion."

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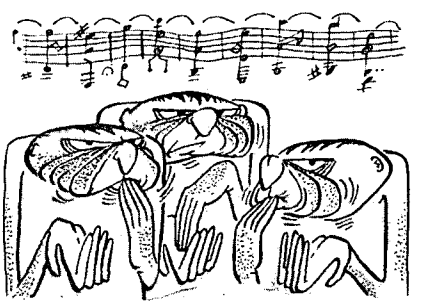
SEPTEMBER 1: On this date in the year 9909, Treth Schmaltar died on his home planet of Wellington V. All the Galaxy knows his famous Symphonic Storm Suite; less known, but equally interesting, is the history and development of its solo instrument.

The natives of Wellington V feed on airborne plankton, which is carried by the vibrations of sound or speech. This was a little-known fact for many years, but did account for the joy with which the first explorers on Wellington V were greeted. Their speech created waves that fed the natives.

When eating, the natives emit a strange humming noise, due to the action of the peculiar glottis. These facts drove the first settlers, like Treth Schmaltar, to the invention of a new instrument.



This was a large drumlike construction with a small hole in its side through which airborne plankton could enter. Inside the drum, a Wellingtonian crouched. When the drum was beaten, the air vibrations drove plankton into the native's mouth, and he ate and hummed.

(A mechanical device has since replaced the native. This is, of course, due to the terrific expense of importing both natives and plankton to other planets than Wellington V for concerts.)

Thus, a peculiarity of native life led not only to the Symphonic Storm Suite, but to such lovely compositions as Schmaltar's Hum-Drum Sonata.

SEPTEMBER 30: The victimization of the swanlike inhabitants of Harsh XII, perhaps the most pitiful musical scandal of the ages, was begun by Ferd Pill, born on this date in 8181. Pill, who died penitent in a neuterary of the Benedictine Order, is said to have conceived his idea after perusing some early Terran legends about the swan.

He never represented himself as the composer, but always as the agent or representative of a Harsh XII inhabitant. In the short space of three years, he sold over two hundred songs, none of great length but all, as musicians agree to this day, of a startling and almost un-Hnau-like beauty.

When a clerk in the records department of Pill's publishers discovered that Pill, having listed himself as the heir of each of the Harsh

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XII composers, was in fact collecting their money, an investigation began.

That the composers were in fact dead was easily discovered. That Pill was their murderer was the next matter that came to light.

In an agony of self-abasement, Pill confessed his crime. "The Harshians don't sing at all," he said. "They don't make a sound. But — like the legendary swan of old Terra — they do deliver themselves of one song in dying. I murdered them in order to record these songs, and then sold the recordings."

Pill's subsequent escape from the prison in which he was confined, and his trip to the sanctuary of the neuterary, were said to have been arranged by the grateful widow of one of the murdered Harshians, who had been enabled by her mate's death to remarry with a younger and handsomer Harshian.

DECEMBER 5: Today marks the birthday of Timmis Calk, a science teacher of Lavoris II.

Calk is almost forgotten today, but his magnificent Student Orchestra created a storm both of approval and protest when it was first seen in 9734. Critics on both sides of what rapidly became a Galaxywide controversy were forced, however, to acknowledge the magnificent playing of the Student Orchestra and its great technical attainments.

Its story begins with Calk himself and his sweetheart, a lovely being named Silla.

Though Calk's love for Silla was true and profound, Silla did not return his affectionate feelings. She was an anti-scientist, a musician. The sects were split on Lavoris II to such an extent that marriage between Calk and his beloved would have meant crossing the class lines — something which Silla, a music-lover, was unwilling to contemplate.

Calk therefore determined to prove to her that a scientist could be just as artistic as any musician. Months of hard work followed, until finally he was ready.

He engaged the great Drick Hall for his first concert — and the program consisted entirely of classical works of great difficulty. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony opened the program, and Fenk's Reversed Ode closed it. Calk had no time for the plaudits of critics and audience; he went searching for Silla.

But he was too late. She had heard his concert — and had imme-

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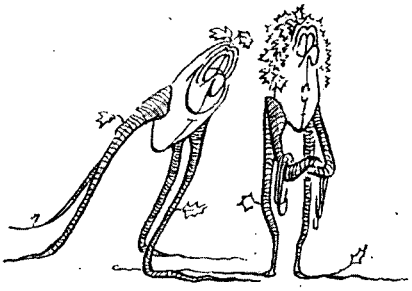

diately accepted the marriage proposal of a childhood sweetheart.

Calk nearly committed suicide. But at the last moment, he tossed the spraying-bottle away and went back to Silla.

"Why?" he said. "Why did you reject me, after hearing the marvelous music which I created?"

"You are not a musician, but a scientist," Silla said. "Any musician would have refrained from *growing* his orchestra from seeds."

Unable to understand her esthetic revulsion, Calk determined there and then to continue his work with the Student Orchestra (it made a great deal more money than science-teaching). Wrapping his rootlets around his branches, he rolled away from her with crackling dignity.

— LARRY M. HARRIS

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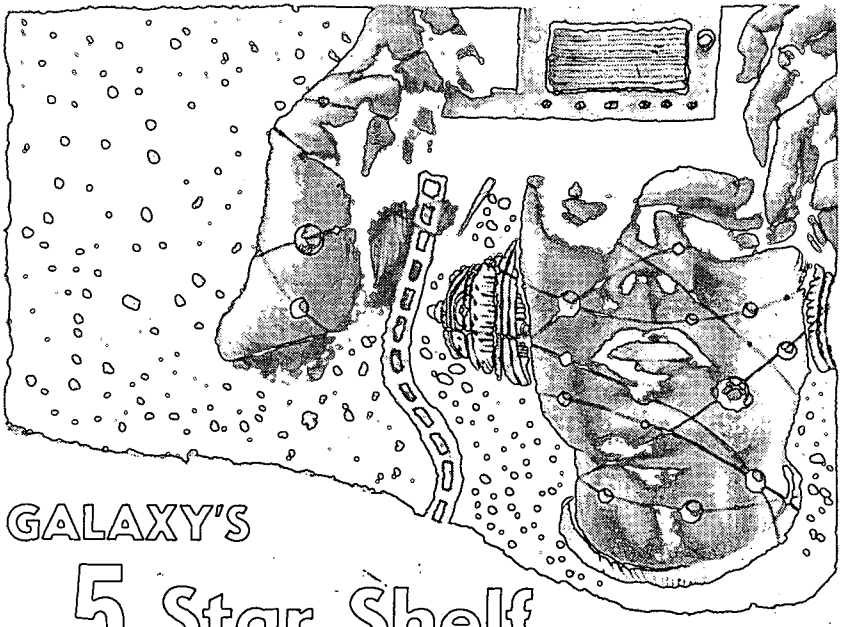

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

NO PLACE LIKE EARTH by Louis Charbonneau. Doubleday & Co., N. Y., $2.95

ONE of the most exciting books books of the year, although a first novel, this story contains all the necessary elements — taut and cumulative suspense, mystery, intrigue, a gripping chase.

The action occurs in the hours from 11 P.M. to 5 A.M. as the protagonist lies helpless on an interrogation slab of the Population Control Corps, memory erased by Underground drugs. A brutal PCC captain, with personal axe to grind, uses counter-drug and electroshock in the hope of restoring memory by 5 A.M., rendezvous hour of the Underground.

Similar to *1984* in background, benevolence is the keynote and Malthusian-principled population control coupled with controlled famine are the crutches of the dictatorship. The story is told in a series of flashbacks as the shock treatment restores bits of memory. The method is effective as a plot device and the reader should find it almost impossible, as I did, to stop reading merely for the sake of eating.

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YEAR 2018! by James Blish. EARTHMAN COME HOME by James Blish. Avon Publications, Inc., N. Y., 35c each

INDEPENDENT both in plot character, these stories nevertheless were intended as a two-part saga of Man's path to the stars. In *Year 2018!* both West and East, steeped in bureaucracy and ultra-security, make research and information exchange almost impossible. A Machiavellian senator from Alaska becomes a future-day Moses who leads Man to the stars but may not cross the gulf himself.

This dim picture of the next few decades was valid just a couple of years ago, but Blish never dreamed of satellites so soon. Who did?

Discovery of longevity drugs and anti-gravity allows entire cities to abandon Earth for greener pastures in *Earthman Come Home,* the more familiar story of the "Okies," flying cities of itinerant laborers.

Blish's devious plot twists are reminiscent of the Asimov "Foundation" saga in which the shortest distance between two purposes is an indirect line. You'll enjoy matching wits with the mayor of Manhattan and his inverted approach to the hearts of problems.

A TOUCH OF STRANGE by Theodore Sturgeon. Doubleday and Co., Inc., N.Y., $2.95

IF a Sturgeon collection is always a ding-dong event, the present volume constitutes an entire carillon.

In "A Crime for Llewellyn," "The Girl Had Guts" and "It Opens the Sky," he successfully pulls off story types new to his talents. "The Pod in the Barrier," "The Touch of Your Hand," "Mr. Costello, Hero" and "The Other Celia" must be immodestly termed masterful psychological studies, for they all appeared here.

Strenuously recommended.

DANGER IN THE AIR by Oliver Stewart. Philosophical Library, N.Y., $6.00

OLIVER STEWART, WWI ace, British government test pilot, commentator at the famous air shows at Farnborough, is exceptionally qualified to assess aviation accidents. His expert study of the causes of aircraft disasters from the earliest days of unpowered gliders to the Comet jet-liner tragedies is particularly effective just now. The history of fifty years of aviation is eloquently written in this account of its errors and accidents.

Unfortunately, the infinitely greater demands on men and machines in the coming space age almost guarantee publication of a similar sad but proud volume soon after 2000 A.D.

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THE SPACE EGG by Russ Winterbotham. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.75

THE pilot testing a new rocket plane returns from forty miles up with a punctured canopy, torn and bloodied pressure suit, two halves of chinalike eggshell and no plausible reason for being alive.

However, his character and actions have altered so much that he is obviously either another man or a double feature with an extra added attraction — he shakes off wounds like a self-sealing gas tank and displays Samson-with-full-head-of-hair strength. When a female associate develops the identical characteristics, humanity obviously had better look to its bulwarks.

ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA. The Grolier Society, Inc., N.Y., $299.50 *to* $600.00

SINCE the rude awakening of Oct., 1957, bright scholars are being given the fullest opportunity to develop their potentialities instead of being chained to mediocre level. The sciences have priority status. Extra-curricular research is a must. Resultingly, last October's Junior Education Corner, featuring the ten volume *The Book of Popular Science,* an excellent referent for scientific information, was very well received.

For advanced study, a more advanced reference work obviously is indicated. Cognizant of this fact of life, the editors of *Encyclopedia Americana* have incorporated articles crammed with the latest information on a galaxy of scientific topics. Additionally, of a total of some 26,000 pages, over 22,000 have been completely rewritten or revised within the past four years with particular attention to the word level suiting the special needs of junior and senior high school students.

The list of contributors is truly monumental: Wernher von Braun, Gen. Otis Benson, George Gamow, S. Fred Singer, Alexander de Seversky, etc., etc.

"No one can see the limits of the desirable application of radioactive isotopes in research, science, and industry, whether in medicine, agriculture, or manufacturing." Gen. Leslie R. Groves, *Atomic Energy.*

"Cybernetics includes communication as a statistical problem in which messages not sent play an equal role with messages sent." Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics.*

"Astronomers are waiting for a telescope outside the earth's atmosphere in order to extend their field of activities. The chances are good that they will get their wish granted before the present century comes to a close." Willy Ley, *Space Research.*

The thirty volumes encompass

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nearly the total sum and essence of Man's knowledge and place it within anyone's reach, at home or in the library.

SF, THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY, edited by Judith Merril. Gnome Press, N.Y., $3.50

I STATED, in my commentary on Clifton Fadiman's fine *Fantasia Mathematica,* that an anthology can be greater than the sum of its parts. Miss Merril's third annual collection proves that the reverse is likewise true.

The real trouble is that her literary tastebuds are too few, too far apart, and too overdeveloped, so that sharing an anthologized meal with her causes gagging, about halfway through, to those who don't share her affliction. She serves very much too much of what she likes, and everything else is spinach.

This is a disservice to the individual items on the menu. Many of them are good — though certainly not *greatest* — but they are all dessert.

Using a large section of the book for Sputnik articles is surely one of the great editorial blunders of our time.

THE YEAR WHEN STARDUST FELL by Raymond F. Jones. John C. Winston Co., Phila., $2.00

THIS latest addition to Winston's admirable juvenile SF library is also one of the best to date. A facile writer, Jones also is a credible plotter.

For story development, he accomplishes the breakdown of civilization by having Earth capture colloidal particles from a passing comet that have such affinity for metals that all machine parts weld to each other. The ensuing contest pits ignorance vs. knowledge, good vs. evil, with the ultimate survival of mankind as table stakes.

The characters are drawn in black and white, but primal conflict *does* remove most shades except blood-red.

STAR GATE by Andre Norton. Harcourt, Brace & Co., N.Y., $3.00

MISS NORTON is justly famous for her juvenile fiction, which has — at its best — few peers but no betters. Her present effort is not her best. It runs heavily to action, an ingredient always in plentiful supply in her works, but here preventing a full development of an alien picture.

The "Star Lords," presumably Earthmen who have bollixed up the lives of Gorth's inhabitants, finally leave after hundreds of years. Spaceships long gone, they resort to dimensional travel via the "Star Gate," winding up on an alternate Gorth where their counter-

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parts have made an even greater mess of the planet.

In leaving too much to imagination, Miss Norton has made identification next to impossible for the youngsters.

THE ROCKET PIONEERS ON THE ROAD TO SPACE by Beryl Williams and Samuel Epstein. Julian Messner, Inc., N.Y., $3.75

FEW scientific pathfinders find easy acceptance of their theories or inventions; none have had rockier rows to hoe than the pioneer rocketeers.

For centuries, rockets were either toys or wildly inaccurate artillery. Sir William Congrave greatly improved range and accuracy, but for a century longer, almost no experimentation was done despite Verne and his immense impact on public interest.

Ziolkovsky, Russian; Oberth, German; Goddard, American, were the architects who made the V-2, Sputnik, Vanguard and Explorer possible. This is the fascinating story of these men and those who followed.

Although our efforts have already pierced deep space, most of the rocket pioneers are alive today!

Notes:

ADVENTURES IN SOUND AND SPACE by C. E. Crumpacker. RCA Victor, $1.98. The kids will love this realistic LP disk. Blastoff, Space Station, Moon Crash and Mars are highlights. *A FLOATING CITY: FIVE WEEKS IN A BALLOON: THE BEGUM'S FORTUNE* by Jules *Verne,* $3.00 each. The leadoff three in the noted new Fitzroy edition of these former collector's items. More to follow. From Gnome Press, P.O. Box 161, Hicksville, N.Y.

Correction: Dr. David H. Keller, referred to in this column as "late," is still very much with us.

—FLOYD C. GALE

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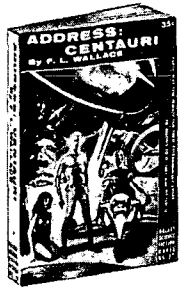
MISSING SOMETHING?

TWICE IN TIME

By Manly Wade Wellman

Ironic destiny of a visitor from the future trying to take advantage of things to come.



ADDRESS CENTAURI

By F. L. Wallace

Earth was too perfect for these extraordinary exiles — to belong to it, they had to flee it.

MISSION OF GRAVITY

By Hal Clement

All the science on earth might not be able to meet the demands of this alien race..

THE FOREVER MACHINE

By Mark Clifton and Frank Riley

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Soft Touch

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

quid (kwid), n. *(From* quiddity — *fr. L.* quid *what, neut. of* quis *who.) 1. Mutant human representing the essence* (quiddity) *of irreproachable moral conduct and free from all vices. 2.* Slang. *Despicable person.*— Webster's New Interplanetary Dictionary, Second Edition, 2143.

LIKE rifle fire, the vehement voices cracked through the quiet morning air.

"Quid! Quid!"

"It's a quid!"

"Lousy, filthy quid!"

Wayne Conover's hand whitened

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What can one do with a pushover except push him over? And if he reacts to it like some blooming saint, here's the way to nail him!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

on the tiller and he swung the car sharply toward the shoulder of the freeway.

"Hey, Joe! We got us a quid!"

"Let's fix him up good!"

"Grab the dirty louse!"

High-pitched voices, the piercing shrieks of children, counterpointed by the deeper bayings of adolescent youths.

Conover swallowed his fear. The epithets weren't, after all, being hurled at him. He braked the car to a stop beside the weed-infested

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tract and let the rush of inbound traffic hiss indifferently by.

The lot was overflowing with kids. They came on in an angry, swelling tide. They crushed through the weeds and left eddies of dust and eager spores swirling in their wake. They wielded sticks and cast rocks and flung thick clods of mud.

Before them, in panic, fled the quid.

He was a middle-aged man, bespattered and torn. Blood coursed down his cheek and there was the frenzied look of a flushed quarry on his face.

He ran with a limp. Evidently it wouldn't be the first time the juvenile mob had overtaken him on this otherwise ironically calm morning.

Helplessly, Conover stood on the side of the road, unable not to share the quid's hopeless fright. Several times he started forward. But there was nothing he could do.

A segment of the merciless avalanche of children broke away and circled wide to cut off the man's escape. At the same time, another stream of screaming kids spilled into the lot from the outlying residential subdivision.

The quid went down suddenly, sprawling across a husky youth who had swerved in from a flanking position to dive against his knees. Shrieking triumphantly, the horde closed in.

CONOVER raced for the lot. Of course there was something he could do! He might at least present the pack with *two* targets and divert some of the attack!

But suddenly there was a great fluttering of air about him and the piercing wail of a siren sounded overhead. He watched children scatter in all directions, like the weeds that were bending before the downdraft from the descending copter's blades.

The police vehicle alighted beside the quid and out ran several officers, who made a pretense of giving chase after the juveniles. They laughingly gestured their inadequacy at the edge of the field and, as always, turned back empty-handed.

Slowly the man rose, wiping the grime from his cheeks with a tattered sleeve. A half-hour earlier, he had no doubt been a neatly dressed, respected citizen, his identity as a quid successfully concealed.

One of the officers came over to Conover. "You in on this quid hunt?"

"No, I—"

"Missed out on the fun, eh?" The cop nudged him in the ribs. "Better luck next time — if some damned quid sympathizer doesn't turn in the complaint too soon."

Conover followed him back to the copter.

A lieutenant had the quid by the arm. "You! What's your name?"

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Head bowed, the man answered in a soft, unsteady voice.

"All right, Mister Holier Than Thou," said the officer through his teeth, "we're taking you in for disturbing the peace and inciting riot."

The quid said nothing. One of the patrolmen shoved him roughly forward and sent him sprawling into the copter.

Conover, his blond hair flaying his forehead in the downblast, watched the craft lunge skyward. He set the quid's name in his memory and mentally counted the savings he was bringing to town.

The money was to have been used to furnish the nursery. He realized with some regret that giving it up would make Alice unhappy. But, for a normal person, she had almost a quid's amount of sympathy. She would understand that the arrested man needed the cash much more desperately than they.

IT was almost noon before Conover, as terrestrial accommodations consultant for the Far-Wide Travel Agency, finished with the line of prospective tourists who had queued up before his desk. He reviewed the morning's run of business: three Atlantic Depths cruises with stopovers at Bubble City; two North Polar Resort bookings; four for Everest Peak Lodge; two U.S. Riviera accommodations, and six for the Carlsbad Subterranean Delight Special at the ten-mile level.

It was a sizeable run. It had not been large enough, however, to embarrass the efforts of the other five terrestrial and three celestial consultants. He gathered up the checks and bank notes and went over to deposit them with the cashier.

On the way back, he was stopped by Ed Beaumont at the first terrestrial desk. "Wasn't that you I saw parked off the freeway this morning, Wayne?"

Conover nodded uncertainly.

"Watching the quid hunt, eh?" Beaumont was a bulky, dark man with a seemingly built-in chuckle. "They sure were giving him hell, weren't they?"

"It wasn't pleasant," Conover said.

Beaumont's brows came together dubiously. "I thought it was *great* fun." Then, "Oh, you mean it wasn't pleasant for the quid."

When Conover contributed nothing to Beaumont's enjoyment, Beaumont stopped laughing.

"The way you were standing there," he went on, "it looked like you were itching to get in on the chase. But I never figured you for a quid hunter. Come to think of it, you always impressed me as a pretty placid guy."

While Beaumont considered the contradiction, Conover saw that their conversation might plant grave suspicions in the fun-lover's mind. He started to turn away.

"You weren't *really* enjoying the

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chase, were you, Wayne?" Beaumont demanded, making it a challenge.

A simple falsehood would get Conover off the hook. A few well-chosen invectives, scornfully denouncing the quids, would prove he was a normal person.

But Conover merely said, "I've got to straighten out some things on my desk." It wasn't a lie.

With an amused, speculating look, Beaumont hunched forward. "You're always right there when office collections are taken up, aren't you? And I've seen you volunteer a dozen times to stay on after hours. You make good money, but you don't live very well. I know — I've been out to your house."

Conover squirmed under the teasing but keen scrutiny.

"There's a client at my desk, Ed," he said, thankful for the opportunity to get away. He had no doubt now that Beaumont suspected.

Beaumont rose, smiling. "I had a hell of a run of bad luck this week, chum. One of the kids got sick; the jalopy broke down; I missed a few payments here and there. Can you let me have about a hundred?"

Conover reached for his wallet. But then he hesitated. He was fully aware that Beaumont was merely testing a suspicion, that compliance with the request, under the circumstances, would only expose his identity as a quid. Yet Ed's child *had* been sick.

"You mean you've got it on you?" Eagerly, Beaumont watched Conover's hand emerge with the wallet. "Actually," he added, making his voice sound wistful, "a hundred and fifty would pull me out of *all* of my troubles."

Conover took the sum from the envelope marked "Baby Furniture."

"Really, Wayne, I don't know when I'll be able to pay this back."

"That's all right."

Beaumont laughed. "Or even *if* I can square it at all."

"Forget it."

ALICE sat distressed on the living room couch that evening. She was a slight brunette, attractive despite the worried expression that hounded her face. There was a neatness about her bearing which stood out in defiance of advanced pregnancy.

She looked at last at her husband. "And you gave him the money?"

Conover nodded miserably. "But I'll make it up to you, honey. We'll get everything the baby needs."

"That's not the point, Wayne! Beaumont *knows*. There's no telling what'll happen now!"

He dropped down on the couch beside her. "I'm sorry, honey."

'Why didn't you, just for this one time, say no?"

"I—well, maybe he *really* needed the money."

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"More than us? Don't you see he was just trying to find out if you're a — if you're different?"

Dismally, Conover clasped his hands together. "He'll do one of two things. Either he'll let it out, or he'll prove he's a pretty human guy, after all, and keep it to himself."

"Or, more likely," she suggested bitterly, "he'll take advantage of you and bleed you for all he can get."

"I don't think Ed's that way. He was simply amused over meeting a quid. He just wanted to see if it was true — if we were as defenseless as they say. He'll probably return the money tomorrow."

"Oh, Wayne!" Alice let out a harassed sigh. "If there's anything more frustrating than the fact that you always do what's right, it's the trust and faith you have in *everybody*. Can't you ever suspect *anybody* of *anything?*"

He rose and paced. "I knew I'd let you down," he said in self-reproach.

Her face softened immediately. "I'm not angry, Wayne."

"Then disappointed."

"I knew what I was getting into. You told me what it would be like, being the wife of — of someone different. I believed you, without reservation. I'm not sorry — not one bit."

She kissed him on the cheek.

Still not reassured, he raised his hands uncertainly. "What do we do now? Run again, the way we did two years ago?"

"I doubt it." She looked down at herself and laughed. "I won't be in my best running condition for a few weeks yet."

It was her pregnancy that made things infinitely worse. He'd known other quids before, like himself. They all had a rough time trying to hide their identity. Whenever they were discovered, they had to flee like frightened animals. But he'd never known one with a child. And he wasn't quite certain what to expect of the future.

"Everything's going to be all right, you big dope," Alice promised cheerfully, putting her arms about him. "And being married to you has its compensations — like never having to worry about another woman, and knowing that when you say I'm pretty, you mean it."

"But—"

She placed her fingers lightly over his lips. "But nothing. I'm going to fix supper. You try to forget about the whole thing."

He watched her disappear through the swinging door, wondering whether he fully realized how wonderful she actually was. She was forgiving. She understood and accepted his mutant quirks. She was even resigned to his unreasonable irresponsibility with their money. Yet it wasn't easy for her. Charity, truthfulness, honesty—they

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were traits she had to *acquire* in a continuing struggle against basic human instinct. It was much more difficult than in the case of a quid, where those virtues were innate and irrevocable.

"WELL, son, you put your foot in it again, I see."

Alice's father, shaking his almost bald head, stood in the doorway leaning on his stick. He was a rather tall man, lean and compact for his age. And the cane always impressed Conover as being more of a personal affectation than an aid to walking.

"You heard, Dad?" he asked, upset.

"Everything," the old man shot back. "And I don't aim to apologize for eavesdropping."

"No, of course not. Not when it's something that concerns all of us."

"Well, what're you going to do?"

Conover slumped dispiritedly. "Not much I can do, except wait and see what Beaumont decides."

Dad raised his cane menacingly. "I know how to take care of that scoundrel — wrap this thing around his neck and dare him to open his mouth. I'll see him if you want me to."

"That wouldn't do any good. If it's not Beaumont this month, it'll be somebody else next month. I've been here two years without being discovered. And that must be a record."

The old man was quiet for a tense while. Finally he said, "Alice isn't playing it from the shoulder. She's hiding a lot."

"Bills?"

"Bills. Mounting expenses. She missed a couple of payments on the house. But what else would you expect? You make good money, but not enough to throw it around like a free-wheeling philanthropist. Damn it, son, you got to think of your family!"

"I try to. But I always seem to run into somebody who needs help. If only I weren't such a soft touch."

"You don't have to be. The word 'no' is still in the dictionary."

Conover leaned back and thrust his hands in his pockets. Dad didn't understand. Alice didn't either. It wasn't that they didn't want to or didn't try. God knew they were as sympathetic as any normal person could be. But nobody who wasn't a mutant himself could appreciate the relentless compulsion to do good that drove a quid.

Alice's father cleared his throat. "Well, the immediate problem is that you gave half your savings to Beaumont, and the other half to some poor Joe who's in the same shoes you're likely to be in, in a few days. I can see you through part way with my pension check."

"You won't have to. There's the bonus."

"Which won't be in hand for another six months. Son, if you'd just

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take a poke at someone once in a while, or haul off and cuss somebody out!"

CONOVER realized then how helpless he felt and how much of a misfit he and all the others like him were. In an all-quid world, things might be different.

"What makes a quid, Dad?" he asked in misery.

"We've had them around all the time without knowing it. Some were called saints and burned at the stake. Others found their way into religious organizations. That gave them a sort of sanctuary. By renouncing worldly things, they reassured all the frightened normal people that they weren't in competition with them."

"Frightened people?"

"Of course. Other people are afraid of you. That's why they hate you. That's why they pass laws that you can't gather in groups. That's why they're trying to fix it so you'll have to register as quids and wear identification marks."

"*They* are afraid of *us?*"

"People can't tolerate others who look the same but are so different. They sense a threat to their way of life — a threat that's even more dangerous because it's hidden."

"But they *make* us hide!"

"That figures. You're also their conscience. You're the spiritual perfection they've been hypocritically talking about for thousands of years. You only serve to make them realize how far they are from spiritual perfection. People hate superior individuals."

When he went to bed that night, Conover lay awake a long while listening to Alice's almost inaudible sobbing. He felt even worse when he realized she had held it in until she was certain he was asleep.

Throughout the next day, though, Beaumont acted as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Twice he passed by Conover's desk to discuss schedule changes. On neither occasion did he mention the money or even hint at the fact that Conover was a quid.

Then, on his way out at closing time, he came around again. Smiling warmly, he laid several bills on the blotter.

"There's the one-fifty," he said. "Decided I didn't need it after all."

Absently watching the other personnel file out of the office, Conover felt a gratifying sensation spread over him. That he was retrieving the money wasn't in the least important to him. What counted was that his faith in the man had been justified.

BEAUMONT came around the desk and cuffed his back. "And don't worry about your secret. It's safe."

"I — I don't know what to say, Ed."

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"Don't have to say anything. Come on out and have a drink and — Hey, Bob!" he paused to shout at Snyder, the cashier, who was just going out the door. "I haven't checked in my receipts yet. Neither has Conover."

"I'm in a hurry," the man called back. "You're chief consultant. You have access to the safe, so do it yourself. But leave the slips on my desk."

Beaumont held Conover's deposit box open while Conover filled out his entry slip and placed the cash and credits within. By now the office was otherwise empty.

At the first terrestrial desk, Beaumont hastily made entries on his own slip, wedged his deposit box under his arm and led Conover into the cashier's cage. He dialed open the safe, placed his cash container in with the others and laid Conover's beside it. Then he paused to complete his entries.

"I forgot the Barstow credit certificates," he said. "Get them for me while I finish this paper work, will you? They're in my top drawer."

Conover couldn't find them there, however. He called back information to that effect and was told to try the side drawers on the right and, when they weren't there either, the ones on the left.

"Sorry, Wayne!" Beaumont finally called out apologetically. "They were in my pocket all the while!"

When Conover went back into the cashier's cage, Beaumont was making the last entry on his sheet. "Close the safe and give it a twist. Then we'll be on our way."

"About that drink," Conover began. "The baby's due any day now and . . ."

". . . and you want to get home," Beaumont completed sympathetically. "I understand. Anyway, I didn't stop to ask myself how a quid might feel about taking a drink. See you tomorrow then."

In front of the building Conover, still warmed by a gratifying glow over Beaumont's understanding and generosity, stared after him until he was swallowed up by the sidewalk crowd.

Then Conover watched the street lights flash on, buttoned his overcoat and started for the parking lot at the end of the block.

"Just a second, Conover. I want to talk with you."

He turned to see Bob Snyder coming out of the door and locking it behind him. If the cashier had been in the office after Beaumont and himself, Conover realized puzzledly, then he must have been hiding. But why?

"I'm going to offer you a drink too," Snyder said, drawing up beside him. "But the difference is that I don't expect to be refused."

The cashier was a meagerly built man who hardly came up to Conover's eye level. His face was intense.

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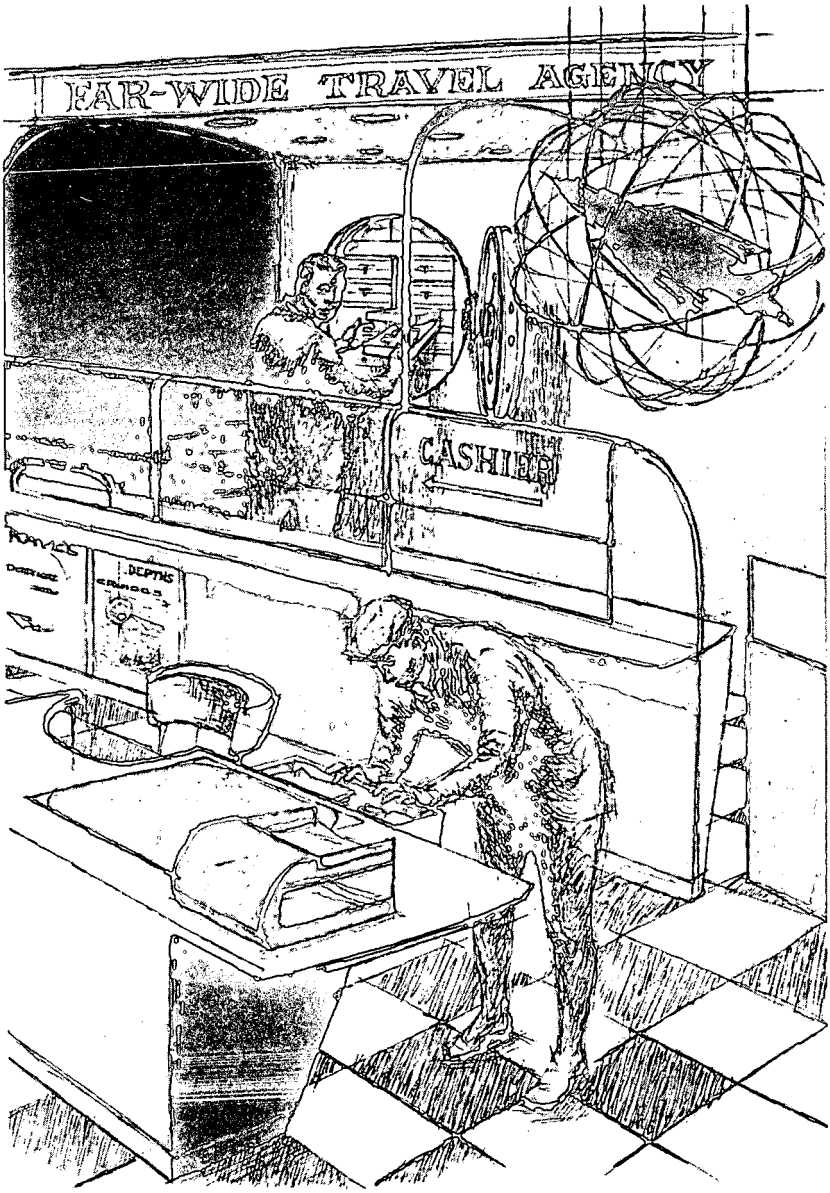

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'So you're a quid," he said evenly. "That explains everything."

THEY hadn't spoken since Snyder had ordered a double scotch and Conover a glass of port.

The cashier took a long draught, set his glass down heavily on the bar and said, "You're not only a quid — you're also a prize dupe."

"Why did you come back in the office after pretending to leave?" asked Conover in bewilderment.

"Beaumont," Snyder began casually, "is usually the last to come in every morning, so I was curious when he was the second one in today. He didn't know I was already there, of course. I was even more curious when I saw him hide something that looked like a flashlight in his desk. Know what it was?"

Conover silently shook his head.

"A capacitance echo neutralizer," Snyder told him. "It's a device that's popular among the criminal element. Whenever anybody gets near a metal object, like a safe, he leaves an echo of his individual capacitance impressed on its outer molecular structure. These impressions fade away in time. But as long as they're there, they tell which persons, in what order, were in the vicinity."

"It doesn't make sense," Conover objected.

"To you, it wouldn't. A quid, by nature, isn't suspicious. Anyway, when Beaumont sent you to get the Barstow certificates, he emptied all the deposit boxes into his pockets, wiped his fingerprints off everything and used the electronic gadget to neutralize his capacitance echo on the metal. Since you closed the safe, you're the only one who'll be implicated when the money is missing. Beaumont will probably say you watched him open the safe, memorized the combination, found some excuse to stay in the office after he left, and took the money then."

Conover gripped the stem of his wine glass. Beaumont's trickery came as a sobering revelation. He wondered just how desperately in need of money the man was.

"We'll go find him," he said urgently. "We'll get him to put everything back."

"Turn the other cheek, eh?" Snyder snorted. "You quids are unmitigated suckers."

"What are you going to do — turn him in?" Conover was thinking of Beaumont's wife and children.

Snyder finished his drink and thoughtfully repeated the question. "Am I going to turn him in? Let *me* ask one first: Would a quid really cover up for Beaumont? Would he accept guilt?"

THERE seemed to be a hungry eagerness about the man's expression, a savage look.

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"He wouldn't want to see anybody suffer – not even Beaumont," Conover offered frankly. "He would probably let it appear that he was a guilty person trying to establish his innocence. That would be one way of keeping his identity hidden and protecting his family. They'd suffer, you see, if it became known he was a quid."

Snyder smiled. "That's probably just the way Beaumont figured it. And he knows enough about quids to realize he was on safe ground."

Conover studied the other man's expression. It was a twisted smile, as though he were telling a joke and nearing the punch line.

"We're going to help Beaumont out of this jam, aren't we?" Conover asked.

Snyder tossed down the rest of his drink. "Of course not."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm sitting pretty. He took a real haul out of that safe. Cash. Negotiable credits. And I'm the only one who could louse it up for him. He'll kick in every last cent – and more – to keep from serving a prison sentence."

The stem of the glass snapped in Conover's hand. But his stare remained rigid. "Why are you telling me this? You could have blackmailed him after I was arrested – without me even knowing about it."

The hungry, impatient look clung to Snyder's face. Conover had no idea what it signified.

"Why?" Snyder repeated, taking him by the arm and sliding off the stool. "Come on, I'll show you."

He led him through a side door behind the bar and out into the alley. In the dim light that stabbed in from the street, the cashier's face was even tenser than it had been at the bar.

Conover had seen that expression once before – on the face of a mentally deficient child who was amusing himself by tormenting a litter of day-old puppies and watching them squirm in agony.

He brought up his arms to ward off the blows he suddenly saw aimed at him, but he didn't expect the kick in the groin.

CONOVER was late getting home that evening. With one eye half closed, he had to drive slowly. Then, too, he pulled off the freeway several times and used his handkerchief to stop the flow of blood from his cut lip.

He tried to think of some way to avoid Alice and her father. But they were in the living room waiting for him.

Wavering in the doorway, he heard Dad's muffled oath and his wife's sharply drawn breath as they stared incredulously at his bruised and lacerated face and his torn clothes.

Alice hurried over and helped him into a chair.

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"What happened?" her father demanded. "Was it Beaumont?"

"No."

"Don't stand there, Dad," Alice pleaded. "Get a towel and some hot water."

She didn't say anything until he returned. Then, as she pressed the cloth against her husband's cheek, she asked with restrained terror, "Did someone else find out, Wayne?"

"Weren't in a quid hunt, were you?" the old man persisted.

"No. I'd rather not talk about it."

"Leave him alone, Dad," Alice said. "He'll tell us if he wants to."

"Don't have to tell," Dad grunted. "I can imagine what happened. Somebody else found out what he is. Probably some little pipsqueak of a character who couldn't hold up his end of a tiddly-winks match. Somebody tired of playing the role of spineless underdog and deciding to assert his masculinity for once in his miserable life. I just wish to hell I'd been there!"

"Is that what happened, darling?" she asked.

Conover nodded.

"Who was it?" Dad said.

"Let's not talk about it now. I'm tired."

"Of course you are," said Alice, putting his arm around her shoulder and helping him toward the bedroom.

Conover felt thoroughly miserable. He wanted to tell her about his other difficulties — about the safe burglary and all that had happened since then. But what end would it serve? Certainly neither she nor Dad could help. And he might at least give them another day or two of peace and security before the ceiling fell in.

When Alice returned to the bedroom hours later, however, she avoided his gaze while she changed into her nightgown and got into the other bed. She turned her face toward the wall.

"I'm leaving you, Wayne," she said at last.

He only continued staring at the ceiling.

"If you could think harshly of *anyone*, you'd probably think I was selfish, picking this time to break away," she went on. "But if I can walk out now — while you're in trouble — then I know I'll be able to stay away for good."

Actually, he realized, it was the only solution. There was but one way out of paying for Beaumont's crime, and that was to let himself be exposed as a quid. He couldn't expect Alice to share either stigma.

"Wayne?" Despite her obvious uneasiness over his continued silence, she still avoided looking his way. "You know why I'm leaving, don't you? It isn't because I can't take it. It isn't that I don't love you. And I'm not running out because you're in trouble."

"It's for the baby," he said,

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"That's right. You're the nicest guy and best husband who ever lived. But you're a luxury the baby can't afford. Both of us realize our child deserves more out of life than being the son of — of someone different."

SINCE it mattered little now, Conover went to work two hours late the next morning. As he had expected, there were two police copters on the roof of the building and an official car in front.

He had almost reached his desk before the plainclothesman overtook him. "You Conover?"

Before answering, he glanced about the room. Beaumont was busy with a client. Behind the cashier's window, Snyder had his head bent low over the counter.

"Yes, I'm Conover."

"Captain wants to see you in Mr. Markey's office." The plainclothesman escorted him without relaxing the grip on his arm.

In the private office, Markey looked up severely from his desk and fastened unwavering eyes on Conover.

"That him?" asked a police officer standing by the window.

"Yes. But I'd like to talk with him alone for a minute, Captain."

The captain shrugged. "You're president of the company. It's your money."

Markey offered Conover a chair after the others had gone. "Whether it's necessary or not, Conover, I'll fill you in. Fourteen thousand in cash and credits turned up missing from the safe this morning. The police capacitance echo scanner showed Snyder opened the safe at eight-oh-five. That was when he discovered the money was gone. The only other capacitance trace the scanner picked up was yours — deposited at approximately six-twenty last night. The police also found your fingerprints on the safe. What do you have to say?"

Conover bowed his head. "Nothing."

Markey impatiently drummed the desk with stout fingers. "You're a quid, aren't you?"

Conover glanced up abruptly. "Who told you? Beaumont? Snyder?"

The president smiled. "All right, Captain," he called out, "you can come in now."

The officer entered, followed by several other men.

"Just as you figured," Markey explained, "he's a quid. Two men in this office know it — Beaumont and Snyder. I'd say that just about takes care of the inconsistencies."

The officer and plainclothesmen and another man who was jotting down notes on a pad stared with naked dislike at Conover.

"You want to lodge any charge against him?" The captain thrust an eager thumb toward Conover.

"No," Markey said firmly. "I'm

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no quid hater. Now I'd appreciate the privacy of my office again. Conover, you stay here."

The others filed out and Conover asked, "What inconsistencies?"

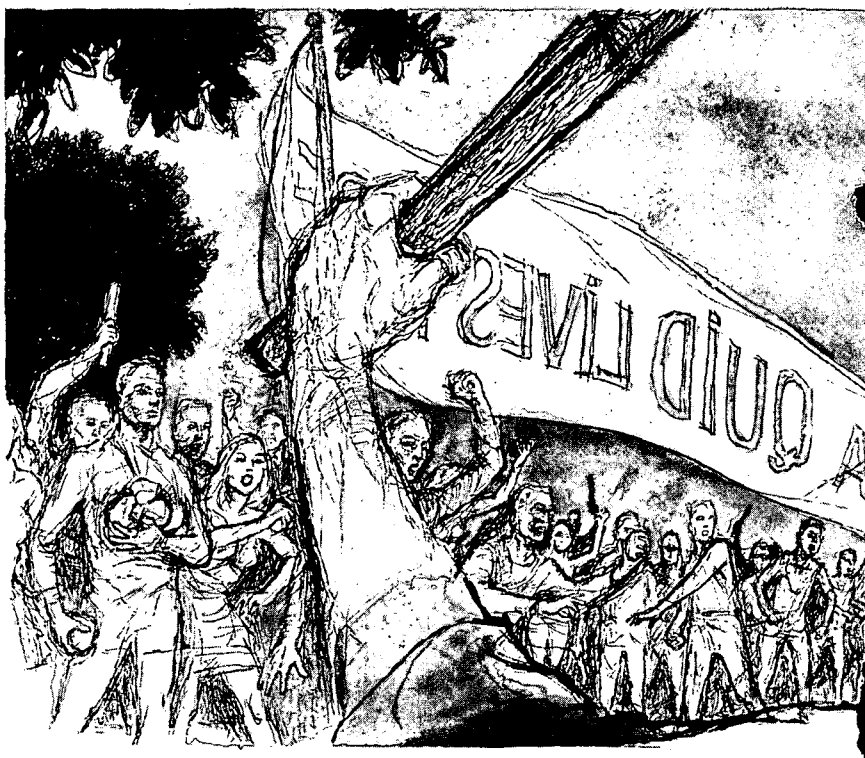
"The police thought it looked like a frameup. Beaumont or Snyder, whoever it was, apparently intended to erase only his own previous echo from the safe. But he used so much juice that he left the metal virgin pure. Your echo leaped out so clearly that you were the *last* one we could suspect."

"How did you know I was a quid?"

"Only a quid would be naive enough to let himself be played for a sucker like that."

Markey had been smiling amiably for several seconds. But suddenly his expression became quite serious.

"Like I told the captain," he continued hesitantly, "I'm no quid hater. I believe in live and let live.



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If there are people who can't do any wrong and insist on making things easier for the rest of us, I don't mind that either."

He came around the desk and laid his hand on Conover's shoulder. "But I'm a practical businessman, Wayne. I'll have to let you go. Having a quid around wouldn't help business any."

"But nobody else has to know!" Conover said hopelessly.

"You're wrong. You saw the reporter who was here. The whole story is probably already on the newscasts. I wanted to keep him out. But you know how those things go — whenever somebody tries to sit down on this kind of news, the first shout that goes up is 'quid lover!'"

Conover started for the door.

"I'm sorry, Wayne," Markey said.

And Conover knew he sincerely was.

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HE stopped the car more than a block away from his home and sat there appalled at the harsh reality of the scene.

There were scores of persons — many of them neighbors and friends — milling around on the front lawn, like explosive charges waiting for an insignificant spark to set them off.

Someone had festooned the customary banner from pole to pole across the walkway. The words were vivid and cruel:

A QUID LIVES HERE!

He watched two men, each carrying a pail, break loose from the crowd and dart up the steps. They swung the buckets and splashed steaming tar across the white siding of the house. Dipping sticks into the viscous liquid, they scribbled filthy words on the weatherboards. Then they had to retreat from a hail of stones that went crashing through the glass door and windows.

Conover held the tiller in an anguished grip. Alice! God, if *she* was in that mess!

He sent the car spurting forward, but slammed on the brakes again as he saw his father-in-law coming from behind a hedge in front of the next house. His sweater was torn and stretched grotesquely out of shape and his chin was bruised. A broken cane, the upper half of which he still gripped tenaciously, showed he had not been the only one to get hurt.

He got in the car. "Well, son, you damned well maneuvered us into it good this time."

"Where's Alice?" Conover asked, afraid of the answer he might get.

"She's all right. Packed a grip and left an hour before the newscasts came out."

Conover sent the car rolling slowly forward and turned at the first intersection. "What can I do, Dad?"

"Don't know as how there's very much you *can* do. Nature just made a mistake with people like you. This isn't the first time she turned out a batch of useless, lethal mutations. It's her idea of a joke, I guess."

"I don't suppose there's any use asking where Alice is."

Dad leaned back against the cushion and exhaled audibly. "No, there isn't. She made me give my word."

Conover swallowed.

"But they tell me St. James Infirmary," the old man added casually, "is a pretty good place for a woman to have a baby."

THEY waited while the floor nurse ran a finger down the roster of patients. But she paused and glanced up troubledly.

"Alice Conover?" she said, frowning. "Conover — Conover — *Wayne*

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Conover! You're that quid!"

"Hurry it up, sister," Dad said irately. "We want to see her."

The nurse's features grew set and hard. "Visiting hours are at seven. But don't bother coming back. She won't be able to see anybody."

An orderly who had overheard stepped forward. "If this quid is giving you any trouble, Miss Davis," he volunteered, "I'll let him have it."

"No, Mr. Johnson. We don't want any riot *in here*. He'll leave."

"Alice—" Conover pleaded—"has she had the baby yet?"

Dad lunged to the desk and grabbed for the roster. But Johnson seized his wrist, jerking him away.

"Oh, Dr. Dorfmann." Relieved, the nurse glanced down the hall at a white-smocked man who was just coming out of the nursery. "Please, Doctor. Over here."

The elderly physician, grinning genially, came over. His presence seemed to cast a spell that instantly restored the composure of the nurse and orderly. Harsh lines of anger and hate vanished from their faces and were replaced by fond smiles.

Dad too, Conover noticed puzzledly, was visibly moved by the man's overwhelming personality, and was staring at him with fascination and intense respect.

"Yes, Nurse?" Dorfmann inquired.

She seemed lost in an outpouring of inarticulate affection. Her submissive expression of gratitude and respect was like a soft light on her face.

Conover drew back, bewildered over the strangeness of the scene.

"Oh." Miss Davis abruptly found herself. "This is Mrs. Conover's husband. He's that — quid."

Dorfmann laughed lightly. "Now is that so important?"

"I told him he couldn't see her."

"But of course he may. However, I think he should meet his son first. Have you seen the baby, Miss Davis? We just finished cleaning him up."

She shifted uncertainly. "I — no, I haven't. I'm so busy—"

"I really think you ought to go take a look at the child," the physician insisted gently.

She wavered, but only for a moment. He dazzled her with a smile and she went obediently down the hall.

"You too, Johnson," Dorfmann said to the orderly.

Johnson trotted expectantly after the nurse, as if told that a surprise awaited him.

AFTER they had left, the doctor put his arm around Conover's shoulder in a warmhearted gesture.

Incredulously, Conover gaped at him. "But — but I'm a quid!"

Dorfmann laughed until his eyes moistened. "So am I, son."

Some vast suspicion was beginning to suggest itself to Conover.

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He pushed it away. It was too impossible to believe.

"You can't be! They like you — and everybody hates quids!"

"Original mutants, perhaps," Dorfmann readily agreed. "But not second-generation quids, like your son and me. There's a difference, you know."

Miss Davis came eagerly out of the nursery. "Why, Doctor, he's the loveliest baby we've ever had here! There's something about him that simply—"

She hesitated inadequately, as though struggling to find words that had never been needed until this moment.

She stopped trying and turned instead toward Conover. "I'm sure you'll be awfully proud of him. If there's anything we can do for you or Mrs. Conover, you just let us know."

The orderly returned to the hall. "Say, Doc, I'd sure like to bring my wife to see *that* baby. Will it be all right?" But before Dorfmann could answer, Johnson seized Conover's hand and pumped it vigorously. "Congratulations, Mr. Conover. You're sure lucky to have a kid like that."

The physician stopped smiling and nodded his head confidently after the orderly had started striding up the corridor. "You may have had a rough time until now," he told Conover. "But with *that* baby, you'll do all right from here on out."

Johnson paused in the doorway to the nursery. "Don't you two guys forget to vote for Dr. Dorfmann in the next election."

"You running for something?" Dad asked the physician.

"Congressman from the Sixth District. Maybe I'll be able to do some real good there." He added facetiously, "And I think I have a *fair* chance of being elected, don't you?"

Johnson stuck his head out the nursery for a final word. "Say, Conover, maybe your kid'll run for President some day!"

— DANIEL F. GALOUYE

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crime

By J. T. McINTOSH

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

THE tiny ship let herself down furtively, pretending not to be there. Since she was landing plumb in the middle of fifteen million square miles of uninhabitedness, she had every chance of getting away with the pretense.

The pilot, George Kimber, looked for a lake, found one, and dropped toward it as if pulled by a cable. A couple of hundred yards from the edge, he landed neatly and looked around him curiously.

He had once visited the friendly northern hemisphere of Vokis; it was hard to believe this forbidding landscape was part of the same planet. Three smoking volcanoes were visible from where the ship lay. Half a mile away, a hot spring suddenly hissed and spouted. No grass, no trees, no vegetation of any kind brightened the sullen wasteland of solidified lava, dull red igneous rock and

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sand that sulked under a metallic gray sky.

Looking down, he saw his passenger emerge at the base of the ship, lugging two heavy cases. She was unusually shapeless in a white asbestos suit. He would have gone down to help her, but her instructions had been quite definite — she was to set foot alone on the surface of Vokis, and she and the ship must be away fifteen minutes at most after landing.

She made three rapid journeys, dragging very big black cases to a spur of rock only a hundred yards from the lake. The shape of this rock suited her purpose excellently. A huge flat stone had fallen over on a smaller rock, forming a fair-sized cave closed at one end by hard-packed sand. Although it was only five feet high at its apex, the cave afforded a perfect cache.

When she had packed the cases inside, she kicked sand into the entrance to seal the gap, but couldn't fill it. She needn't worry, Kimber thought—the stuff could stay there undiscovered for a thousand years.

One small box she left out of the cache. She buried this in the sand right at the water's edge, stamping the sand hard on top of it. Then she ran well away from it along the shore of the lake and stopped with her back to the box she had buried.

Kimber leaned forward in excitement, knowing what was going to happen. No matter how often he saw this, he could never quite believe it.

Suddenly the girl was in the water, precisely where she had buried the box. She didn't walk there, run there or jump there. She just *was* there. And where she had stood an instant before, water splashed and soaked into the sand.

Jumping out of the water and shaking herself, she ran toward the ship, waving to Kimber. She was satisfied.

In another five minutes, the ship was out of Vokis's atmosphere and heading back to Earth.

IN the comparative void of space, another ship sped toward Vokis. But this was months later, and this ship was a hundred times larger, and she wasn't pretending not to be there.

She was the *Vokian Queen*, one of the regular Earth-Vokis liners.

McKinlay hesitated before pushing open the door of the cabin, a worried frown on his face. The trouble with complicated plans, no matter how brilliant, is that you almost invariably need assistants to help you carry them out. And that means relying on others for the success of your plan, your liberty and even your life.

McKinlay hated having to rely on anybody but himself.

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However, it was much too late to withdraw now. He pushed open the door and went inside.

The girl in front of the mirror waved casually to him in the glass. His eyes widened incredulously as he saw her reflection. In two jumps, he was beside her, roughly jerking her shoulder to spin her round.

"Oh, God!" he muttered savagely. "Why am I surrounded by fools?"

The girl tore her shoulder free and turned back to the mirror. "They say you know a man by the company he keeps," she said drily.

"Suppose anybody saw you like that — don't you know it would ruin everything?"

Joan said nothing. She was studying the face in the mirror as if it were somebody else's. As a matter of fact, it was — literally.

She was a medium-sized blonde with a figure that was no more than passable, and her white sheath evening gown did nothing to make it look any better than it was. Her breasts were small and hard, her waist thickish and her hips too lean.

Incensed almost to violence, McKinlay had to jam his hands in his pockets to prevent himself from wrapping them around her throat.

"Are you out of your mind?" he demanded. "If anyone on board this ship saw you like that—"

"I haven't invited anybody to my cabin," she said mildly.

"Yes, but suppose somebody—"

"Well, if anybody but you came in, I guess I could always jump up with a shriek and dive into the bathroom."

"All the same—"

Joan sighed. "Genius, I'm going to tell you something for your own good. People aren't as dumb as you think. I know I'm not as smart as you. Nobody is. Nevertheless, when I do something, there's quite often some vague, childish, half-formed idea behind it."

McKinlay calmed down. "Such as?"

"Such as practice."

"Practice?"

"I may sometimes have to become Opal in a hurry. And then become me again in nothing flat. So it seemed to me that even the frightful risk of somebody bursting into my cabin and seeing another woman there was worth taking to—"

McKinlay grunted. "Let's see you become Joan McKinlay in nothing flat."

"Okay," Joan said amiably.

SHE stood up and threw off her clothes. Some women don't show themselves in their skins for reasons of modesty. Others shouldn't for reasons of common

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sense. Joan was one of the latter.

At least, at the moment, she was.

She picked up the two electrodes of a small machine on the dressing table, put one foot on the seat and applied the electrodes above and below her calf. The muscle jumped in protest. With firm double strokes, she chased it where she wanted it to go. After a few seconds' treatment, she put that leg down and her other leg up. The effect of her treatment was to move the swell of calf about two inches higher. Her thighs received a deft stroke or two, and too-hard muscles relaxed.

When she stopped working on them, what had previously been merely a couple of passable feminine legs were in the showgirl class.

The two electrodes touched her groin, extended the arc, curved in, and she had the taut abdominal muscular development of a belly-dancer. The hard muscles of her breasts were softened; her bosom became full though still firm, and when she laid down the electrodes, she had a figure in a million.

She sat at the table again and began to model her face. The electrodes tightened her cheek muscles. An ointment which she handled very carefully with cotton held in forceps enabled her to give her small chin a slight cleft. The same ointment changed the shape of her ears and flattened them to her head. A quick eye rinse brightened her eyes and appeared to darken their blue color. Her nose shrank under the application of another ointment. She took caps off nine teeth, improving them in the process.

Having completed her transfiguration, she moved immediately to the washstand, washed her hands and face quickly, and swabbed and dried the areas of her body which had been touched by the damp electrodes.

Again without pause, she turned to the bed and picked up another dress, also white, also an evening gown. But when she slipped it on and stepped into high-heeled sandals, the fact that in both cases her hair was the same, her height and weight unchanged and her dress a white evening gown, only served to emphasize the other differences.

"Well?" Joan asked.

"Four minutes," McKinlay said. "Same time the other way?"

"A little longer. This is me. It's easier to get back to being me than to duplicate Opal. Six minutes the other way."

McKINLAY nodded grudgingly. "Pretty good," he conceded.

"How about it?" she asked. "Was I right to practice? Maybe in my half-baked, fumbling way,

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I had some excuse for taking such a fearful risk of ruining your master plan?"

"Oh, sure."

"Thanks for the most gracious apology," said Joan.

"One thing, though. You're not wearing anything under that dress."

"I know. If seconds count—"

"Now look, Joan. C.O.S. is the cleverest, most efficient, most thorough police force in the Galaxy. One tiny mistake and they're on it like hawks. Any really close observer could see you're not wearing a thing under that dress."

"Any really close observer is meant to," she retorted blandly. "Genius, I'll have to tell you again. People aren't as dumb as you think. I especially am not as dumb as you think."

"Are you telling me—"

"Listen. On Vokis, I intend to wear clothes that would make Madame Pompadour look like a new girl at a convent. The only thing I'm going to wear under anything is skin. Don't tell me you can't figure out why."

"I can't figure out why," he said stiffly. "Seems to me the best thing is *not* to attract attention, instead of—"

"Genius, let's face it, Opal's figure wouldn't excite a sailor marooned for a year. The more I flash mine around, the more preposterous it's going to seem that I could ever be taken for Opal, or vice versa."

McKinlay shrugged reluctantly. "Maybe you've got a point."

"You never spoil anybody with compliments, do you?"

"Hell, I've admitted you could possibly be right. What more do you want?"

"Nothing." She looked at him with whimsical exasperation. "I see you're going to play your part all right."

"Huh?"

"Pretending to be my husband."

"What are you talking about?"

"There's no risk of anybody thinking you're too attentive to me for me to be your wife."

"Hell, no. This is a business partnership."

"Obviously."

McKinlay frowned. "You told me you wanted it that way."

"Oh, yes. So I do. But when a girl surrenders her virtue and maidenly modesty in the interests of a business partnership, she'd still prefer the partner to be at least interested."

McKinlay grunted and dropped the unimportant subject. "Are you sure that transmitter you planted will still work? Did you set it up right?"

"Do we have to go into that again?"

"I just wondered if you were quite sure—"

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"Genius, pay attention while I repeat—people aren't as dumb as you think. Especially, I'm telling you again, me."

McKinlay grunted again, unconvinced.

OPAL Conway — Opal herself, not an imitation — looked exactly as Joan — made up to resemble Opal — had looked in the sheath evening dress. She was at the window of a room high in an hotel in Vanna, one of the principal cities of the planet Vokis.

"That's the ship landing now," she said.

Behind her, Bill Conway dropped his glass. It didn't break, of course; the bourbon soaked into the thick carpet.

Opal turned impatiently. "For Pete's sake, take a grip on yourself, Bill."

"I hope to God they're not on it," said Bill fervently.

"Of course they're on it. Think we've been planning for six months just to give up now?"

"I wish I'd never listened to you."

Opal shrugged. "And I wish I'd never had to tell you anything about it. But you have to know. You may have to cover up for—for the other girl."

She knew the room wasn't tapped. Nevertheless, it would have been lunacy to mention Joan and McKinlay by name. She knew how often people who are certain they aren't being overheard do happen to be overheard.

"Look, honey, we'll never get away with this," said Bill hopelessly. "The Vokis police . . . the C.O.S. . . ." He shuddered.

Opal didn't bother to answer.

Bill bit his nails nervously. He was a thin, harassed man, not yet thirty, but already very thin on top. Opal was hard and metallic, the kind of woman who seldom even pretended to care about anything beyond her own interests. She could make love to a man or shoot him with the same uncomplicated efficiency.

"Why did it have to be you?" Bill burst out.

"You know very well why it had to be me."

"Yes. You're a teleport. I wish—"

With quick, angry strides, Opal was before him, and she slapped him stingingly on the cheek. "Didn't I tell you never to mention that word?"

"Sure, honey," said Bill, cowering back. "I only—"

"Get this straight. We can't miss so long as the C.O.S. never get the slightest hint of how it's done. Tele — people like — the other girl and me are rare as snowstorms on Mars. When we start to operate, it will certainly occur to somebody in the C.O.S. that a — that one of us might be mixed up in the affair.

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But never in their wildest dreams will anybody imagine there are *two* of us. And until they start working on that idea, they'll never figure out how it could be done. So get this, sweetheart. If you mention that word once more while we're on Vokis, you'll never get to say it twice."

"Sure, honey," said Bill again.

It would never be guessed that if Opal cared for anything or anybody apart from herself, it was Bill. But that was the case.

VOKIS was easily the richest world in the Galaxy. It was also one of the most pleasant to live on, with its mild winters, not too hot summers, and complete absence of native life, with its warm, calm seas and beautifully planned cities.

How it came to be such a paradise was largely because it was an unusually young world to be habitable. Its internal heat was high and its sun was gentle and well-behaved. There had been time for the crust of Vokis to become hard and stable — except in the southern volcanic region, which was unlikely to be settled for many centuries yet — but not enough time for indigenous life to develop. So life came to it, as is the way of life.

The humans who came to Vokis had learned a lot about colonizing worlds by this time and didn't make the usual mistakes. Given a chance, for once, to set up their own ecology, they seized it gratefully, and any errors they did make canceled each other out after a century or so.

The result was a world without insects or birds — unless you counted imported chickens and ducks. A world without pests of any kind, for only herbivorous animals were brought to it, all large enough to be kept under control. A world where even the bacteria were controlled.

All this would have amounted to nothing unless the mineral resources of Vokis made settlement worthwhile. However, the mineral resources of Vokis were more than adequate. Gold, silver, platinum and diamonds were so common that mere export of raw ore soon ceased to be economic. Vokis became the prime manufacturer of small precision goods. Watches, clocks, electronic components, tools, lenses, cameras, stone settings — anything which was small and light and expensive became virtually the monopoly of Vokis.

Because Vokis was rich anyway, it wasn't worth the effort of making and exporting anything but the best. And soon everybody everywhere knew it. A Vokis label meant supreme quality. Vokis found herself in the sublimely comfortable position of never quite being able to catch up with the demand

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throughout the rest of the Galaxy for her products.

Wealth attracts buzzards like carrion. Until nearly half a century ago, Vokis had been rich and lawless. But when Vokis began strictly controlling immigration and formed the Civil Order Service, the best paid, least corruptible and most astute police force in the Galaxy, law and order came to stay. And still more wealth migrated there to enjoy the protection of the C.O.S.

Now Vokis was a legend. Everybody wanted to go there; few were admitted. Every crook wanted a share of the loot; none got any.

But to do the criminal fraternity justice, there was always somebody ready to try.

THE customs inspection was as exhaustive and exhausting as McKinlay had been led to expect. He was glad that he and Joan had made no attempt to sneak in the apparatus they needed. The only way to install it anywhere on the surface of Vokis was the way Joan had already done it.

That was also, of course, the only way to get anything away.

All Joan's makeup equipment had been consigned to the *Vokian Queen's* very efficient and carnivorous disposal system. So McKinlay was able to watch the exacting customs examination with the amused tolerance of one who wasn't attempting to smuggle anything.

It was warm and sunny as he stepped out on the field. To the west lay the fabulous skyline of Vanna. To the south, the sea. To the east, five broad highways leading to other major cities. To the north, a tall, good-looking man who was exhibiting keen and disturbing interest in Greg McKinlay.

"Mr. McKinlay?" said the tall man pleasantly. "My name's Glyn Morgan. Welcome to Vokis."

"I didn't expect to be met," said McKinlay, summoning surprise and pleasure to cloak his uneasiness at seeing so soon the dreaded Civil Order Service badge. "Glad to know you."

"I understand you're here to do a book on the C.O.S.," said Morgan affably. "Your publisher asked for cooperation, and naturally we're glad to oblige. Isn't your wife with you?"

"That's her coming down now," said McKinlay.

Morgan looked up and blew all his fuses. Joan had emerged wearing Bermuda shorts and a suntop which contained an astonishing amount of material considering it managed not to conceal anything. Watching the tall, handsome and very efficient-looking C.O.S. man go to pieces at sight of Joan, McKinlay felt much better. He was only a man, after all.

"Joan, meet Glyn Morgan of the C.O.S.," he said.

Joan walked straight-legged on

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her high heels up to Morgan and took his hand.

"To say this is going to be a pleasure," Morgan croaked hoarsely, "would be to state only one per cent of the truth."

Joan smiled. "Greg," she said over her shoulder, "see about the divorce, will you?"

"Mrs. McKinlay," said Morgan earnestly, "don't say things like that unless you mean them."

It looked as if Joan's idea was correct, McKinlay had to admit. It would never cross Morgan's mind that Joan could be mistaken for non-whistlebait like Opal Conway.

MORGAN was most helpful. McKinlay had known very well that no ingenious, untrue story would get him into Vokis unsuspected. He really had approached a reputable New York publisher with an outline and specimen chapters of a book on the C.O.S. of Vokis which had made the book editor's eyes glisten.

This was not surprising, for McKinlay had paid a top-line crime writer a fat fee to produce the synopsis.

Since McKinlay's proposal was to go to Vokis with his wife at his own expense to collect the necessary first-hand material, the publisher was perfectly willing to draw up a contract for the proposed book and make the approach to Vokis asking for cooperation.

Morgan took them on a quick helicar tour of the main landmarks of Vanna, giving them enough important bearings so they wouldn't ever get hopelessly lost. He showed them his own home and traced the route to the McKinlay's hotel. He installed them in their suite and indicated his eagerness to tell or show McKinlay everything he wanted to know, either immediately or at any time he might suggest.

"That's very kind of you, Morgan," said McKinlay. His brain raced. Although he liked to work everything out to the last detail, it delighted him to be able to seize any opportunity of improving on an already excellent plan. "How about this evening — about eight, perhaps?"

Joan looked up sharply. "But, Greg—"

"Or maybe a little later," said McKinlay quickly. "Eight-thirty?"

"Sure," said Morgan. "Nothing else you want now? Don't hesitate to call on me for anything you want. That goes for you too, Mrs. McKinlay."

"And if there's anything you can't do for me," said Joan artlessly, "I can always ask your wife."

"My wife? I'm not married."

"Oh," said Joan, as if that were a very important item of information.

Morgan laughed somewhat breathlessly and left them.

They knew better than to start

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talking where they were. McKinlay suggested a stroll before lunch, and Joan made a few harmless remarks about what a nice man Mr. Morgan was.

Only when they were out on a broad, handsome boulevard did Joan say: "As you once so politely asked me, are you out of your mind? This evening is the first job."

"Exactly," said McKinlay with satisfaction. "Zero hour is 8.46. Morgan will arrive at exactly 8.30. We'll give him a drink. You'll be wearing one of your most sensational outfits. It will play hell with Morgan's concentration. I'll see this after a while and tell you to go and put on something decent. At 8.39 you'll laught, tease Morgan, and go into your room to have a bath and change."

"I get it," said Joan admiringly. "Genius, sometimes I think you're too smart for your own good. Or mine either."

"That gives you seven minutes to turn on the water, make your change, turn off the water, and do the job. You could join us again at 8.57."

"Quick bath," Joan commented.

"With company in, would anybody take more than a quick dip? If we ever are suspected, Morgan will say he was with me all the time and that you were out of his sight only for ten or twelve minutes — not long enough to walk to the end of the street."

"Genius," said Joan, "I could kiss you."

"Save that for Morgan. I must say you're doing a good job on him. He thinks you like him."

"I do like him," said Joan warmly. "I think he's cute."

"Cute," McKinlay said in disgust.

BILL had to go to the party, for it was really he who was invited, not Opal.

McKinlay had arranged his and Joan's research visit to Vokis fairly easily. The Conways had arrived four months earlier, however, and they'd had to give a genuine reason to be there permanently, so they had come in as immigrants. For all four participants, the whole plan had been complete, exact as to dates and times.

Neither McKinlay nor Joan had the faintest idea where the Conways were or what they were doing, but that didn't matter. Not the first time.

Bill had been readily accepted as an immigrant because he was a top-grade precision tool cutter. There could be no fakery about that. You were good at your job or you weren't, and Bill was.

"Now look," said Opal as they dressed for the party, "don't come near me with a cocktail glass. If anybody drops a martini over this dress..."

Bill shuddered at the thought.

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"You'd better not dance either," he said.

"Why not?"

"Somebody might step on it."

Opal looked at him with more favor than usual. "You're right, Bill. Surprising, but you're right. I won't dance till afterward. And remember you've got to cover for Joan. This is the weak part of the scheme, counting on you to take care of emergencies, but there shouldn't be any. Is your watch right?"

It was an ordinary party, nothing remarkable about it, no notable people present. For the most part, the men were in the precision tool business. The women were merely their wives.

But at such a gathering in Vanna, there was always a display of treasures worth fortunes. The host alone had *objets d'art* worth millions lying around all over the place. Given ten seconds, any ordinary thief could pick up a cool half-million.

And Opal was no ordinary thief.

When she and Bill arrived, she couldn't help smiling with satisfaction. The party was in a vast lounge with a softly lit dance floor and dark corners galore. Any of the latter would do for her purpose. She pointed two out to Bill.

This was going to be easy. She glanced down at her dress, a long black gown with a full skirt. There was nothing unusual about it except that anything dropped down her bosom would not drop out.

Then she glanced at her watch . . . 8.21. Not nearly time to get busy. She'd begin at 8.43.

"And this is my wife, Opal," Bill was saying. She smiled automatically at a fat woman and priced her necklace at four hundred thousand.

TWO hours before Morgan was due to arrive, McKinlay went into the bathroom, locked the door and ran the water. His coldly analytical mind had come up with a possible snag. If the bathroom in the suite was wired for sound, with a C.O.S. man at the other end — and such things had to be considered — Joan couldn't use it as she planned. In the first place, the number of baths she was going to have to take would be highly suspicious, and also their timing. In the second place, it would puzzle any listener to hear somebody get into a bath and then listen to a lot of remarkably blank silence.

So before he let her proceed, he checked for microphones.

In their luggage had been a little gadget which wasn't at all suspicious, since it was used to check for breaks or bad connections in wires. It also, naturally, discovered wires where there weren't supposed to be any.

McKinlay switched it on. If there was a microphone and any-

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one was listening, the listener would get frying noise and might guess that someone was testing for wires. A giveaway, but it couldn't be helped.

A weak, limited electrical field sought out line conductors and pointed them out. McKinlay got the light, the mirror demister, a power point and some metal ornamentation. That was all.

Encouraged, he adjusted the little instrument and checked for permanent magnets, moving coils, ribbons, crystals. He found nothing.

The water flow was silent, by pressure from below. Even if there was a microphone in one of the other rooms, it wouldn't pick up sounds of the bath being filled.

Satisfied, McKinlay opened the door silently and beckoned to Joan. He closed the door behind her quietly. The lounge radio was on, turned up loud.

"It's all right," he murmured. "You can go ahead."

She put on a white bathing cap and started to slip off her wrap.

"You staying?" she asked. "There's nothing you can do."

"I know," he said, but made no move to go.

She shrugged, dropped the wrap, stepped out of her shoes and lowered herself into the bath. For a moment she hesitated, concentrating. Then she lowered her head under the water so that she was submerged — and disappeared.

The level of the water changed slightly. Though the human body is largely composed of water, the average specific gravity is slightly different. Joan hadn't been replaced by her own volume of water, but by her own weight.

McKinlay stared down at the water in the bath. It had become cooler and slightly cloudy . . .

JOAN raised her head and saw the scene she had first fixed in her mind some months before. Three volcano peaks. Sand. Lava. Red rock. A leaden sky.

She stood up in three feet of water and waded out of the lake.

Teleportation was a rare talent, and teleports who could jump half across a planet to a transmitter were rarer still. First-stage teleports like Opal Conway could make the jump easily enough *from* a transmitter, but there were very few whose talents were highly developed enough to tap the power of a transmitter half a world away and go right to it. Joan herself couldn't have made the teleport if she hadn't fixed every detail of the location firmly in her mind on the one occasion when she was actually there.

That was why she, not McKinlay, had had to set up the cache.

The things she had hidden in the crack in the rock were undisturbed, which was no surprise. Even reconnaissance flights across this re-

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gion were rare. The C.O.S. had no smuggling problem and consequently had little interest in possible unauthorized landings in the wasteland. Vokis needed no tariff protection — consequently, smuggling didn't pay.

From one of the cases, Joan took a black dress with a full skirt. Opal would be wearing a dress exactly like that. Joan laid it out ready, complete with accessories. From the same case she took a complete makeup kit. She would have to take it back with her.

Usually she would teleport here, make her change to resemble Opal, switch with Opal at the agreed time, switch again soon afterward (Opal supplying the impetus the second time), restore her own face and figure, and teleport back to the hotel.

But this time, if McKinlay's alibi plan was to work, she'd have to make both changes in Vanna. It was dangerous only in that for an hour or two the makeup materials would be around in the suite, if anyone cared to look for them.

C.O.S. would know all about teleportation, but would assume two things — that a transmitter on the spot was necessary, and that anyone who made a jump would be replaced instantly with his own mass in stone, soil or water from the place to which he'd gone.

In the first assumption, they'd be wrong. In the second, with any luck, they could be deceived. Thieves of all kinds had known for ages that the best way of covering their tracks was to make it appear that nothing was missing.

It may have been true that Shakespeare's works weren't written by him, but by another fellow of the same name. Similarly, when C.O.S. considered teleportation, as they inevitably would, it was hardly likely to occur to them that Opal Conway, instead of being replaced by 124 pounds of sand, had been replaced by 124 pounds of another girl made up to look like Opal Conway.

As for Joan's frequent teleports between the hotel in Vanna and the cache in the volcanic southern hemisphere, the idea of teleporting from a bath to a lake was typical of McKinlay's cunning. There was no suspicious sand or soil or rock to be disposed of somehow — only water which would drain down the pipe afterward, leaving no evidence whatever. Typical also of McKinlay's plans was the fact that any inconvenience or discomfort they entailed — in this case, frequent duckings in cold water — was suffered by somebody else.

Another thing occurred to Joan. She laid a big towel beside the black dress. She'd have to allow at least a minute to dry herself before switching with Opal. Fortunately this wasn't one of the occasions when the substitution would be

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subjected to long and exacting scrutiny.

Now everything was ready. She went back to the lake, waded out in it, sat down in it and ducked her head under the water.

This time it was gloriously easy, with the power she needed right there beside her. Even Opal Conway would have no trouble.

MORGAN arrived at the hotel, as expected, precisely at 8.30. McKinlay was all set with a small tape recorder and a notebook. Joan was all set with a gown which plunged nearly far enough to make her bare-footed.

Drinks were fixed. McKinlay ignored Morgan's distraction and the way his eyes walked around the room with Joan.

"For a start, Morgan," he said, "can you tell me in one sentence why the C.O.S. is so good?"

Morgan could talk without his eyes, and proved it. "The public cooperates," he said absently. "That's the whole explanation. Suppose you, or anybody else, wanted to go to any other city on Vokis. You would have to tell us, and why. Otherwise you couldn't go. If you even wanted to spend a night in any other part of this city, you would have to register in the new locality. Did you see any green boxes at the intersections?"

"Sure. We wondered what they were."

"C.O.S. posts. Tomorrow I'll show you how to use one. If a friend asks you to stay the night, you register at a C.O.S. point. There's a lot of other checks I won't go into now. Result of all this is, whenever anything happens, we can check back and tell who the criminal is before we leave the office."

"I don't quite see how that works," said McKinlay.

The recorder was on. He didn't have to pretend to be interested in this. He was most sincerely interested in it. There are two sides to the law, and people on each side of it are equally interested in how it operates.

Joan bent to give Morgan his second drink, and as she bent over him, he not unnaturally choked over the last of his first.

"The real point," said Morgan, recovering bravely, "is that Vokians accept it as their civic duty to help the C.O.S. Vannans don't get angry when we ask questions or detain them a while or search them or raid their houses."

"Well, that must be a help to you."

"Sure. We get gorgeous help from the public. They show everything. I mean—"

Joan laughed, and McKinlay permitted himself a wintry smile as Morgan went red.

"Joan, you're not in on this," said McKinlay firmly. "Go powder

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your nose. Let Morgan and me talk in peace."

"No, please . . ." Morgan began.

"He's just being polite," McKinlay said.

"I can take a hint," said Joan with mock dignity. "I go to wrap myself in sackcloth and ashes."

"No, don't do that, Mrs. McKinlay. I only—"

Joan smiled. "Get on with your work. I'll take a bath. But don't be too long."

She left the room at 8.39 precisely.

"Shouldn't have brought her," said McKinlay. "Now—"

"How'd you come to marry her?" Morgan asked curiously.

"I don't know. How does anybody come to marry anybody?"

"Wouldn't have thought she was your type, that's all." Morgan shrugged, grinned. "How about reeling back the last thirty seconds or so?"

McKinlay did so. From the tape recorder came the words: "Vannans don't get angry when we ask questions or detain them a while or search them or raid their houses."

"Back on Earth," Morgan went on, "the police got hamstrung when people started screaming about personal privacy."

McKinlay nodded. "Can you blame them? People like to have personal privacy."

"Well, you can educate them out of it. Make everybody admit that people only shriek about violation of privacy when they have something to hide."

"And it works?"

"It works so long as you make it clear that you aren't concerned about personal morals. If C.O.S. uncovers any irregularity that isn't a civil crime, we simply forget it. And we're very tough on blackmail. So if Jones is sleeping with Smith's wife, he doesn't holler 'Privacy!' whenever we come near him. He tells us all we want to know, sometimes more than we want to know, and we move on. If Smith ever finds out, he doesn't get it from us."

"And you mean to say that explains the phenomenal record of C.O.S.?"

"Explains a good part of it, anyway."

McKinlay reflected. "I don't think Earth would stand for a situation like that."

Morgan shrugged. "We don't say C.O.S. methods would work anywhere. All we know is they work on our planet. Society gets the kind of law it deserves."

"Can you give me some illustrations?"

"Of course. Last week, a missing diamond turned up. If it had happened on Earth, right at the beginning the police would've been stymied, because the woman, who had claimed insurance, would have

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said, 'See my lawyer,' and the man who originally gave it to her, who was married to somebody else, would have said, 'I have nothing to say,' and the man who tried to sell it would have said he found it in the street, and so on. As it was—"

Joan's voice sounded plaintively through the bedroom door: "Bring me a drink, Greg."

"Come out and get it," said McKinlay, knowing she was now Opal's double.

"Stinker!" she said, and her steps receded.

It was 8.44½.

WHEN she found herself crouched under a flat stone, Opal pulled up her skirt and detached the bag she had worn underneath. She left it where it lay on the sand. Joan would attend to it.

With it she placed a note which gave details of the next operation. She was careful to move as little as possible, for later she expected to be searched. Sand in her shoes or in her hair might be hard to explain. However, now that she knew the kind of hideout Joan had picked, she could go to the beach at Vanna every few days and any questions about sand in her hair would be answered before they were asked.

Joan weighed several ounces more than Opal did. So now that Opal no longer carried her loot, she had to replace its weight. She did so by drinking deeply from the bottle of water which Joan had left her.

After that, she was ready. She didn't bother to fix the location in her mind. She couldn't teleport there anyway.

All the teleporting Opal had to do was the second switch. Joan did all the rest.

Opal allowed just enough time for Bill to steer Joan into another dim corner of the lounge. Then she laboriously built up the whole scene in her mind — location, temperature, sight, sound, Bill . . .

And she was in Bill's arms again.

"NO, we get plenty of murders," Morgan said.

McKinlay raised his eyebrows. "Though you solve them so easily? I'd have thought Vokis was one place where murder didn't pay."

"Seems when a man gets around to murder, it doesn't matter to him whether he's caught or not. Hardly anybody kills somebody really expecting to get away with it. Very damned few murders, statistically, are professional jobs, here or anywhere else. Husband hacks his wife's head off with an axe and then rings us and tells us about it. Man stabs . . . "

He stopped as Joan emerged, glowing from her bath. It was 8.59.

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"Go right ahead," she said. "I can't be distracting you now, can I?" She was wearing a wrap which revealed nothing but her face, hands and feet.

"Mrs. McKinlay," said Morgan frankly, "you'd distract me if you had on a spacesuit."

She smiled and sat down. "Glyn," she said, "I *like* you. And when are you going to get around to calling me Joan?"

Morgan took about fifteen minutes to get back on track. And soon after that the phone rang.

"It'll be for me," he said. "My department knows I'm here."

He listened for a while, saying practically nothing. Then he put the phone down and turned to McKinlay.

"Like to see a case?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Jewel robbery at a party twenty minutes ago. I left orders to call me if anything interesting turned up. You can come and see the C.O.S. at work if you like."

"Why, sure," McKinlay said with much more enthusiasm than he felt, for this wasn't part of the plan. "Will I see you catch the thief?"

Morgan grinned. "I doubt that. But you'll see us establish the method. Then we'll find who the thief was. Obviously he'll be gone. If he's still there, then you will see us catch him."

"Can I come too?" Joan pleaded.

They might search the suite, McKinlay thought. Just on general principles. He was glad when Morgan said: "Better not, Mrs. — Joan. We'll have to rush if we're to see anything, and you're not ready."

As they went, McKinlay was hoping Joan realized the importance of having the suite ready for a C.O.S. check at all times. Working against the C.O.S., it was impossible to be too careful.

WHEN Morgan and McKinlay arrived, C.O.S. men and women were just finishing searching all the guests. Their thoroughness was obvious.

"Do you really expect to find anything?" McKinlay asked Morgan.

"Very unlikely. But that's not the point. This eliminates one thing. Half the job is finding things to eliminate. Excuse me a minute while I find out the facts."

McKinlay was left standing in a corner. When he moved, one of the C.O.S. men came over and asked him politely to stay where he was. McKinlay began to see how meticulous C.O.S. was. Although they had nothing on him, he wasn't to be allowed to wander about. It wasn't likely that he had any part in the robbery, but they saw no sense in taking chances.

One of the last of the women

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to be searched, Opal Conway, came past. She knew better than to do anything more than glance at him incuriously. McKinlay could realize it was giving her a fright to see him there.

Morgan returned. "Guess I should have waited for more information before I brought you along here," he said ruefully. "We're not going to find anything."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. A lot of stuff has been stolen and it's decidedly gone. Nobody has left, nobody left at any time. Must be one of those gimmick cases. You know, a theft that depends on an idea, a new technique, perhaps a new variation of an old one."

"You mean you won't solve it?"

"Oh, we'll solve it, sure. We never give up, you see."

"What sort of gimmick could it be? I thought there was nothing really new in crime."

Morgan was quite unconcerned about the affair, not seeming even irritated that when he brought somebody along to show how quickly and efficiently C.O.S. could crack a case, it should happen that C.O.S. wasn't going to crack it after all, certainly not immediately. McKinlay couldn't help being irritated by his confidence. Couldn't they see they were up against something big this time?

"Depends who worked it," said Morgan, "and how much trouble he went to. Suppose it was Bryans, the guy who owns the place. He could easily have worked something—false wall, hiding place in one of the armchairs, anything like that. We've had a good look round, but short of tearing everything to bits, we can't be completely sure the stuff isn't still here. But that would be stupid. He'd never get away with it."

McKinlay became even more irritated. Morgan treated this as if a horse had bolted, saying in effect: "Don't worry, he'll be back in a couple of hours." Morgan didn't seem to have any conception of the fact that this was the start of the biggest series of robberies in history.

"What *kind* of gimmick?" McKinlay insisted.

"Well, we had a similar case at a garden party once. Turned out the stuff had been flown away in a small radio-operated helicopter, no more than a foot long. Couldn't be that here, but that's the kind of thing people try. One obvious thing to investigate is teleportation. Know anything about it?"

"Can't say I ever saw it done," said McKinlay cautiously.

"It can be done all right, by certain gifted individuals. Only there are three snags. One, you can't send inanimate objects by themselves; somebody has to take them. Two, when something goes, something has to replace it. Three,

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teleportation needs apparatus. So if it was done here, we can't — at the moment — figure out how."

Opal reappeared, followed by the two women officers who had been searching the female guests. Morgan looked up and they shook their heads.

"Well, that's it," said Morgan cheerfully. "Nothing to see here. We'd better get back. Sorry I brought you out. I thought we'd turn up something."

"I'm glad I came. Maybe I'll get an unsolved case for the book. Even C.O.S. can't be perfect."

Morgan shook his head. "Never claimed we were. All the same, you won't get an unsolved case, Greg. We've never had one yet."

MORGAN's confidence rattled McKinlay as well as irritating him. But days passed and nothing happened that justified Morgan's confidence.

The second job went without a hitch, and since it was a theft from an art gallery with a lot of other people in it at the time, Opal's name didn't get on the record again. On the third occasion, she was one of about three hundred women and forty men in a store. On the fourth occasion, she was searched again, and since by this time the C.O.S. could be trusted to be highly suspicious of Mrs. Opal Conway — all taken into consideration in the plan — the fifth job was carried through without her.

This time Bill and Opal were out of town, at Meshnik, a hundred miles away, and while Joan worked alone, Opal gave herself a cast-iron alibi. Joan got clear with several hundred thousand in cash at a beach house, took it to the distant cache and came back within seconds to join in the lamentations over the theft.

On this occasion, the telltale sand which proved somebody had teleported was deposited in a little pile on the beach, which was a good place to hide it. Though McKinlay hated this particular job for several reasons, one of which was its brute simplicity, it did show the C.O.S. very clearly that the series of big thefts which was beginning to worry Vannans, if not the C.O.S., didn't necessarily involve Opal Conway.

McKinlay was nearly as smart as he thought he was. He knew to a lot less than an inch the difference between a suspicious circumstance that really looked as if it meant something, and the suspicious circumstance that just happened to the most innocent people.

Opal Conway, necessarily, was going to be around when many of the snatches took place. The C.O.S., necessarily, was going to suspect Opal, without being able to prove anything. It must there-

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fore be clearly demonstrated on several occasions that Opal was no more than the young wife of a tool cutter, and that though sometimes she happened to be around when things disappeared, things could disappear when she quite clearly wasn't.

Naturally, the Vannan press had found a name for the thief. He was Shortly. *Shortly lifts $90,000* — or whatever sum or value — became quite a common headline.

Shortly got his name because the C.O.S., asked about progress in the case, usually said, "We expect an arrest shortly."

Morgan's early confidence began to wear thin. He kept McKinlay in touch, sometimes taking him to the scenes of Shortly coups and going over the ground with him. He continued to insist that it was only a matter of time.

HIS anxiety showed itself, however, when he said to McKinlay once: "Greg, about this book of yours. It gave us a kick when we heard about it, and I know from what I've read of it that it's going to be a fine job. But look — you'll be fair about these Shortly jobs, won't you? I mean—"

"I'll be fair, I hope," said McKinlay, "but that means telling the truth, not hushing it up."

"Sure, but what I meant was you'll wait till the case is complete?"

"Until you catch Shortly, you mean? Well, you know we're booked to leave in three weeks."

"Yes, but . . . Look, Greg, what I'm trying to say is, just as a favor to us, why not wait till the case is closed before you publish the book?"

McKinlay was enjoying this very much.

He adopted a judicial air. "We go back in three weeks," he said. "Two months to reach Earth. Probably three months after we arrive before the book comes out. Any time in the next five or six months, I'll be glad to rewrite the Shortly story if you can send me th[illegible]l details. Is that fair?"

"Sure, Greg," Morgan said gratefully. "That's fine. I was a little scared you were going to go back to New York and rush out a book called *The Case That Baffled The C.O.S.* And we'd look kind of silly, even if we caught this Shortly character the following week."

"You've got it all wrong," said McKinlay. "Of course I want the book to sell. And this case—"

"That's what I mean. You could write this thing up so we'd look like—"

McKinlay was shaking his head. "Morgan, the selling point of my book is that C.O.S. is good. I'm not praising it extravagantly; peo-

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ple get that sort of thing in the commercials and grow tired of it. If C.O.S. was just any ordinary police force, what would be the point in the book? How could I expect a lot of people to read it? It would be far better from my point of view if you caught Shortly."

"I see," said Morgan slowly. "Yet sometimes I've got the idea you were laughing at us over this case."

McKinlay paused to think of a good answer, knowing it had to be good. "Frankly," he said, "the tougher you find this case, the better it suits me. Only you've got to win in the end. It's got to be *The Case That Nearly Baffled C.O.S.* See what I mean?"

Morgan nodded, satisfied.

THERE was a certain irony in the situation that when not chasing Shortly and when not being Shortly, Morgan and Joan spent most of their free time together. At first Morgan had been scrupulously correct in inviting McKinlay along too, or asking permission before taking Joan anywhere. But when he found McKinlay really preferred to spend the evenings working on his book — McKinlay played his part to the ends of his fingers — and was glad to have Joan out of the way, Morgan fell into the habit of taking her out to places where a man wouldn't normally take another man's wife.

They had a lot in common and it was fun finding it all out. Joan found Morgan understood a lot of things she wouldn't have expected a cop to understand. Morgan found Joan ready and willing to forget she was supposed to be married, except for a few basic reservations, and he liked her not only for her readiness and willingness but also for the basic reservations.

On these occasions, Morgan didn't talk about his work and Joan didn't exhibit any interest in it. They had other things to occupy them.

Once, however, they almost collided with the Conways, and though nobody admitted knowing anyone else, Morgan murmured later: "See that girl? She was one of the principal suspects in the Shortly case."

"Was?" said Joan.

"Yes. We know now she hadn't anything to do with the last affair."

Joan was perturbed. If it was true that C.O.S. no longer suspected Opal, fine. But in the first place, she didn't believe it; and in the second, why should Morgan say such a thing to her, anyway, unless to observe her reaction?

She made certain she looked completely disinterested in the whole affair.

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Another thing was worrying her. Although she had decided long ago that there was more in life than romance, she was a woman after all. And she had known for some time that in other circumstances she could go for Morgan.

Nothing was going to come of it, of course. She wasn't the kind of sentimental fool who'd confess everything just because she happened to fall in love with a cop.

Nevertheless, it was galling to meet somebody who could be the man of her life when she happened to be tied to another man by something stronger than marriage — self-interest.

Joan was beginning to wish she had come to Vokis cast as McKinlay's sister instead of his wife.

OPAL and Joan cooperated on another job, and then Joan did a second alone.

That left only two of the series. McKinlay's plan was that after the next to the last Opal would be strongly suspected, picked up and questioned, preferably by lie detector (Opal being conditioned for any contest with any lie detector).

While Opal was in C.O.S. hands, Joan — on her own — was to pull the last and greatest of all the Shortly robberies.

However, that was in the future. The present affair concerned a tray of watches wonderfully designed, fantastically expensive, which Opal was to lift from one of the leading jewelers in Vanna.

It was a straightforward, routine affair, and everything went according to plan until Joan, who had switched with Opal, found herself face to face with Glyn Morgan just inside the jewelry store.

She had too much presence of mind to show by her expression that she knew him. Morgan merely glanced at her indifferently and passed behind her. Seeing the indifference in his eyes, Joan was glad she looked like Opal and not like herself. It was an unpleasant shock to see a man look at you and just not care — particularly Glyn.

Opal, she knew, was at the cache, leaving the watches there, and would switch with her again very soon. Rather than go out into the brightly sunlit street, Joan paused to look at a display inside the store.

Suddenly her arm was grasped firmly, and she turned to face Morgan again. She looked at him blankly as if she had never seen him before.

"You've got it wrong," said Morgan quietly. "You *are* supposed to know me."

"Of course I know you, Mr. Morgan," said Joan in a good approximation of Opal's voice.

The grasp on her arm tightened,

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and at Morgan's nod, two men closed in on them.

"That just about sews it up, Joan," said Morgan, and Joan couldn't help starting.

"Joan? What are you talking about?" she demanded. There was nothing she could do but play it out. "Am I supposed to have done something?"

"You're supposed to have stolen twenty-one watches."

"Is this where I give myself away by saying, 'It's a lie—there were only seventeen'?"

"You've already given yourself away. Opal Conway doesn't know me from Adam."

JOAN ignored the more serious thing, the fact that he had called her Joan, and stuck to the matter of the watches.

"What am I supposed to have done with them?" she demanded in Opal's sarcastic tones. "Stuck them in the elastic of my panties?"

Morgan looked at her sorrowfully. "Joan, you just wouldn't believe how thorough we are. When we decided to test for a connection between Joan McKinlay and Opal Conway, it didn't seem likely, but that didn't matter — we never cancel a line of investigation just because it doesn't seem likely. Look." He lifted the hem of her skirt and showed it to her.

"Looks all right to me," Joan said.

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"That's just it. One of our girls cut a little hole in Opal's dress. Yours hasn't got it. The other thing you can't see, but we can. When I kissed you last night, I stuck on the back of your neck a tiny mole that you didn't have before. You've still got it. Joan, you—"

He suddenly stared and cursed. The girl in his grasp had . . . flickered. And in the hem of the dress he was still holding, there was a small, neat cut.

He spun her around. There was no mole on the back of her neck.

"Will you kindly tell me what this is all about?" Opal demanded tartly.

"But there's no transmitter!" he exclaimed wildly, looking at the two men. "How could—"

It was not until then that the full explanation dawned on him.

"*Two* teleports," he said. "That's it. You can both do it, you and Joan. So you never need a transmitter on the spot, and you never leave any ballast around."

"Who is this nut?" Opal asked the two C.O.S. men.

"That isn't going to do you any good," said Morgan, and Opal knew he meant it.

WHEN Joan arrived at the cache, she immediately teleported to the hotel in Vanna, knowing she had a few minutes clear before Morgan, not being a teleport, could get there. She took McKinlay into the bathroom, the only room they knew for sure was not tapped.

"Morgan knows," she said rapidly. "He knew I wasn't Opal. He'll be here in a couple of minutes."

McKinlay didn't curse. He hadn't time. "You switched while he held you?"

"Opal did. He didn't know how it was done then, but he must know now. He isn't a fool. Now what, Genius?"

McKinlay had only a short time to make up his mind. Bluff it out? Take off? Or what?

He didn't need long. "Go to the cache," he said, "and stay there. Kimber will land in five days. The emergency rations will keep you going till then. I'll tell them I don't know anything. Didn't know you were a teleport. Didn't know anything. I may get away with it."

"You might," Joan agreed. "And you might not. People aren't as dumb as you think, Genius."

She wasted no more time. Once more the bath contained nothing but cloudy water, rapidly gurgling away. And it was only a few minutes later that Morgan arrived.

He tried to take a strong line at first, but when McKinlay got angry and insisted he didn't understand a word Morgan was saying, Morgan had to explain, and McKinlay knew that was his first victory.

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Soon Morgan was tacitly agreeing that McKinlay might not have known anything about his wife's implication on the Shortly robberies. Now the beauty of McKinlay's plan emerged.

They had nothing on him, because he hadn't done anything. Joan and Opal between them had done it all. Joan was where they'd never find her, and they'd never break Opal down. Bill, yes, but Bill knew practically nothing.

McKinlay was questioned for hours. He never wavered. If Joan had been engaged in anything illegal, he didn't know anything about it. He didn't believe it anyway.

And only gradually as the hours passed did he allow himself to become surprised, hurt, and puzzled as Joan didn't appear.

When they stopped questioning him, he was exultant. He'd extricate himself yet.

The only thing that worried him was the fact that the C.O.S. had Opal. They'd never crack her by ordinary methods, but there were ways in which even Opal could be broken down.

Then he relaxed. There were interplanetary regulations on things like that. C.O.S. could jail them, but it couldn't brainwash them.

"YOU'RE wasting your time," said Opal bluntly.

"With McKinlay we are," Morgan admitted. He was confident again, relieved. The Shortly case might not be solved yet, but it was certainly on its way toward solution. Now all he wanted was Joan. In two senses.

And he fully expected to get her — in both senses.

He was practically sure now that she'd never been married to McKinlay — a fact which he found exceedingly cheering.

"When are you going to let me go?" Opal demanded.

"Never," he said, and even Opal was chilled by the way he said it. "Let me tell you something, Opal Conway."

"Go ahead."

"You're going to work with us."

Opal studied his face, amused. "You really think I will, don't you?"

"Everybody does," he told her.

"But not me. They've got reason to help you. I don't. And you can't give me any reason to."

"That's just it," he said with infuriating certainty. "There's always good reason for people to work with us. All we have to do is find it."

"You can't show *me* good reason."

"There is a C.O.S. Fleet," said Morgan thoughtfully. "Not a large navy, but quite large enough to catch any ship that tries to land on any uninhabited region. Do I interest you?"

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"Not remotely."

"I'm only making out a case. There must be a ship. We'll catch it. But that doesn't mean we'll catch Joan there — she may not be aboard."

Opal's hard laugh had real amusement in it. "You'll never catch her."

"Ultimately, we must. You know that perfectly well. Whoever she is, she can teleport only from there and back to there. We know now that she can teleport *to* a transmitter as well as from it. But even she can't teleport from a place where there's no transmitter to another place where there's no transmitter. So we must catch her eventually."

"Maybe. What has all this to do with me?"

"A lot. You can help us, and I think you will. Because I'm in love with Joan."

Opal's hard laugh rang out again. "What's the idea of that brilliant piece of fantasy?"

"Your only reason for not helping us is loyalty. No, I'm not making jokes. This scheme could only work if you four didn't cross each other. Even now, when we've got you cold, you won't rat on McKinlay or Joan. But what if I could convince you that it really is better for Joan if you do rat on her?"

"You can't."

"I can try," Morgan said.

McKINLAY was disturbed when he was taken into a room in the C.O.S. headquarters with Glyn Morgan, Opal and Bill Conway, but he didn't show it.

"Who are these people?" he asked Morgan.

"Look, if all you can do is go on acting that faded old part," said Morgan wearily, "why don't you just clam up? Opal has decided to help us."

McKinlay said nothing, knowing how often this tactic worked. He didn't look at Opal.

"She's helping us because I've convinced her that it's best for Joan. And even for you. You're not going to write that book after all, McKinlay. Tell me, did you ever really mean to write it?"

"Since I only have a faded old part to play," said McKinlay coldly, "I'd better clam up."

"Okay," said Morgan agreeably. "Now first of all, just to make you happy, I want to tell you that we captured a small ship in space this morning. The pilot's name was George Kimber. Unfortunately, we couldn't determine exactly where he intended to land."

"I can't see what interest that information, if true, can be expected to arouse in me."

"Yes, you can, McKinlay. Maybe you can understand now why Opal is going to help us."

McKinlay believed the bit about about George Kimber—it sounded

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true. Anger and disappointment goaded him to say: "And what can she do, may I ask? No doubt she has been the guiding spirit behind this alleged plan?"

"Touches you on the raw, does it? No, you were the planner, McKinlay, and you did a fair job. All the same, Opal was and is more important than you."

McKinlay swallowed his resentment. It was quite obvious what Morgan was trying to do — goad him into making damaging admissions. He said nothing.

"SOMEWHERE in the southern hemisphere," said Morgan, "Joan is waiting, hoping Kimber will land. He won't. By this time, she must be wishing some of the loot she has at her feet was eatable. I guess she'd trade a fortune or two in jewels for a ham sandwich. We don't know within fifteen million square miles where she is, and it would take weeks, maybe months or even years, to find her."

He paused and pulled a canvas cover off a cabinet.

"But there's an easier way of sewing the whole thing up," he said. "Know what this is, McKinlay?"

McKinlay knew. He stared at it balefully.

Opal stepped up to the cabinet and checked the settings. She nodded to Morgan.

"Okay," she said, and closed her eyes.

McKinlay threw himself at her in a blind, murderous rage. He knew that by doing so, he was for the first time admitting his part in the Shortly robberies, knew that to the last he should pretend to know nothing. But the sight of Opal working for the C.O.S. was too much for him.

Morgan jumped forward, but it wasn't he who stopped McKinlay. It was Bill. He tripped McKinlay and then stared down at him in horror, terrified of his wrath.

Morgan pulled McKinlay to his feet and marched him to the other side of the room.

"Stay where you are," he said, and patted his pocket significantly. "Opal?"

She closed her eyes again.

Suddenly she was Joan.

There was no attempt at imperceptible substitution this time. Joan was thin and wan and pale, wearing no makeup, her hair lank and stringy, her dress ragged, her feet bare. She blinked around her incredulously as Morgan snapped off the transmitter and grabbed her arm.

He didn't argue with her, not at first. At first he only kissed her.

WHEN she understood the situation, Joan tried to teleport back to the cache.

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Morgan shook his head. "This time you can't do it," he said. "Opal has switched off the unit."

Joan wasn't as cautious as McKinlay had been. She said a few hard things about Opal.

"I don't think you're quite fair to her," said Morgan judicially. "She knows more than you do. Once we caught George Kimber, what was the point in leaving you there to starve?"

"I could have teleported anywhere on this world," said Joan.

"No, you couldn't. Only to places you know, and they're all in Vanna. Opal did no more than put you out of your misery, Joan."

McKinlay swore bitterly. Abruptly Joan staggered, and Morgan caught her in his arms again.

"What would you do for a sandwich?" he asked temptingly.

"This may be a joke to you," said Joan, "but it isn't to me. What's going to happen to us?"

"Nothing very terrible. Life imprisonment, that's all."

He said it so casually that it took Joan a couple of seconds to understand him.

"You can't do that," she breathed.

"We can and will. You're going to stay on Vokis, Joan. I hope there'll be compensations."

He looked across at McKinlay. "That book of yours could never have been authentic, McKinlay. It would have had to miss out the most important thing, because we keep it secret. You kept asking me why C.O.S. was so good, and I could never tell you. It's good because it consists of people who'd rather work for it than go to jail. People who know crime inside out. People like you, McKinlay, and Opal, and you, Joan — and me. Didn't you once say we had a lot in common?"

FOR a moment, she didn't understand that either.

"After this, C.O.S. will be even better," Morgan said. "Two teleports. We can certainly use you, Joan. I wasn't a teleport, just an ordinary safecracker. Does that answer your question, McKinlay?"

Joan laughed at McKinlay's expression. "Genius, I always said you were too smart for your own good. Now look what you've done. You've made yourself a cop."

"You're *not* married to him?" Morgan asked quickly.

"Why, what's it to you?"

"You know what it is to me." But he didn't pursue the topic right then. "Now I guess we should bring Opal back. McKinlay, you'll be quite useful too. Any time some other smart operator tries out a new heist gimmick, it'll be up to you to figure it out for us. You'll like that."

— J. T. McINTOSH

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